


ועידת התביעות  
Claims Conference  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims  
Against Germany

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F R O M   T H E N   T O   H E R E  
F R A G M E N T S   U N D E R   G L A S S

Rebecca Siegel

PII Redacted





## CELEBRATION

Whom should I send an invitation  
To my forthcoming celebration?  
A time of joy is one you share  
With those you love, with those who care.  
My aunts and uncles, no they died,  
My cousins lying side by side in unmarked earth,  
No symbol dating death or birth.

Whom should I send an invitation  
To my forthcoming celebration?  
Across my mind an image dashes  
Of schoolmates who have turned to ashes.  
How few of those I used to treasure  
Can I invite to share my pleasure.

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A P R I L, 1 9 4 5

It was slowly getting darker and colder; that part of the day when surroundings seem alien, losing size and shape necessary for recognition, and fading into one, ominous-looking shadow.

I concentrated on trying to get some sleep, making myself as small as possible in an attempt to fit, lying-down, on the narrow, slatted luggage shelf, suspended over the seats of the passenger compartment. This ledge had been my wooden perching post for the past week - no, it had been only six days and five nights of riding and standing still.

Ours was just one car of a train made up of cattle and passenger cars, a long, slowly-moving snake containing its wretched load of about 2500 prisoners.

Time had lost all meaning. I knew that we had left the camp on April 6 and that now it was April 11 but my body felt as if it had always been twisted in this strange position, contorted in an effort to fit the narrow ledge. I attempted to stretch and look down. On the wooden bench below was my mother, sitting quietly and unmoving next to my brother. Eddie, just 18, was very ill and seemed to have a high fever. His weight had dwindled down to about 80 pounds.

Many years later I would remember this moment very clearly. It would stand out in my memory as the last part of a nightmare which necessarily had to give way to the relief of waking.

The very last car of the train was filled with explosives, anti-aircraft artillery and the German guards which had been with us since we left the camp. They were no longer yelling and cursing and this silence was unusual, even though we could



hear from far away the faint noise of artillery fire. We gathered that we were caught between two fronts. From the east the Russians were moving towards us while from the west the Allied forces advanced. The German army was desperately fighting on both battlegrounds but seemed unable to contain the advancing armies.

Looking out of the window I strained to see the vast, empty grass-land at my right. At left, at the bottom of a hill was a lake. We had been standing here for at least two days, the last 48 hours of a journey which had taken us through a devastated Germany, standing still during the day and traveling mainly at night. German pride did not allow us to be aware of their bombed-out railroad stations and devastated cities in the stark light of day. As usual, there was an indisputable method to the German madness.

This night, though, was different from the previous ones. I remember it as a night during which I was more petrified than ever before in my 15 years' existence. It was now clear that the train with its pitiful human remnants had been doomed from the start. Its final destination was to be the bottom of the Elbe River in East Germany. However, the Russian forces had crossed that river and with the Allied army advancing from the west we had been brought to a standstill. The German soldiers on the train had made desperate attempts to destroy us at any cost. They had activated the explosives at the back of the train to go off during the night, thereby blowing up the train and decimating its passengers into small pieces. It was a night of overpowering fear; waiting and waiting and expecting every second to be the last one. There were no hours or minutes or even seconds passing by but only one terrifying moment after another.

We prayed silently, thought about many things and then we reached a point where numbness set in and we thought about nothing at all. It must now be clear that we survived the night and slowly the morning dawned. I looked around at the





skeletal forms of the somewhat healthy, the sick, the dying and the dead and experienced a burst of euphoria at the certain knowledge of still being part of one of these groups and thankful that it was not the latter. No German guards were to be seen. They had fled and the explosives had been deactivated. At this point we could have just walked away but nobody did. Most of us were too weak to walk any distance. Besides, where would we have gone in the middle of a country whose aim for the last decade had been to wipe us off the earth. Who would help us. So we waited while listening to the noise of artillery in the distance.

There was no food, but after almost two years of constant hunger pains, starvation had become part of our existence. There was no medication to relieve the pain of the open, festering sores which covered our emaciated bodies. There was no shame. Whenever the train had stopped we - or at least those among us who could still walk - had used the outdoors to relieve ourselves. The sick and dying were denied a gulp of fresh air. They were lying in their own excrement and did not even realize it.

Hours passed and nothing happened. To me it seemed that I had always lived this way; hungry, dirty, sick and degraded. Maybe if I had been an adult when the war broke out in 1940 - in possession of a mature value system - it would have been clear to me that this situation was abnormal; these conditions were inhuman. However, I had only been 10 years old in 1940 - a mere child, receptive to the pervasive climate of slow, persistent degradation. Just looking at myself I felt so very inferior. Five years had passed and I had not grown, mentally or physically, and whatever feelings of self-worth I might have had were no more. I had become wise beyond my years in the ways of cunning, trying to cheat death and the ability to look into hell with a blank mind and soul.

Suddenly, in the early afternoon we heard sounds of motors from nearby. In no time we were surrounded by strange-looking, square automobiles driven by black and white helmeted soldiers. Those of us who were able to, left the train to greet our





American liberators. They had stumbled on our train by chance, and to them we must have been a pitiful sight to behold. My mother and I talked to the first soldier close to us and, not being able to vent our thankfulness any other way, we asked him for his autograph. The only paper we had left was my father's photograph on the back of which, to this day, is the inscription "C.Meeuw, Pennsylvania."

The Americans went to work immediately to create some order out of the chaos before them. The ambulatory among us were put on trucks and driven to a nearby village. Each person or family was taken to a different German house. My mother, brother and I wound up as the unwanted guests of the village baker who was ordered, and grudgingly did so, to put the largest bedroom at our disposal. That night we slept peacefully; our painful bodies supported by a soft mattress and covered by eiderdown comforters. Even the omnipresent lice did not bother us.

Our train had been liberated near Magdeburg, a town close to the Elbe River. Out of the 2500 prisoners on the train actually only 179 were Dutch and the many foreign languages were not conducive to following the American commands in an orderly and direct manner.

The next morning, we were again loaded on large trucks and driven to the small town of Hillersleben, a village populated by retired SS men and their families. We landed with a family who put one room in their apartment at our disposal. However, the bathroom was off limits for cleaning purposes. They supplied us with a bowl of water which we used to clean ourselves as best we could. Of course, a little bit of water was of no use in separating our bodies from the bloodsucking lice.

The Americans had not counted on suddenly being faced with the problem of feeding a large amount of prisoners. They opened their kitchens to us but we were unable to eat the heavy soldiers' fare. My mother asked the German woman for



some food which would be easily digestable for my brother. She was given a saucer with about two tablespoons of apple-sauce and the overly convincing explanation that it was all they could spare since they, themselves, had very little food.

My mother and I felt that my brother - who was in the worst shape - needed some kind of substenance to start the recovery process. We took the only thing of value still in our possession, a large candle, and would try to trade it for something to eat. We left my brother in the apartment and walked out of the village into the countryside among farms which all displayed large white flags of surrender. Not a soul was in sight except a stray dog or chicken here and there. What we should have done is taken a chicken and brought it back with us to eat. My mother and I discussed the idea, with thoughts of delicious chicken soup on our minds. It was a fleeting notion. We were too timid, too conditioned by fear, so we walked on. Finally we met a farmer who was willing to part with one egg in exchange for our candle. After carefully taking it back we gave it to my brother who was the one most in need.

The next morning soldiers drove through the streets, informing the citizens through megaphones that they were to leave the village and only take the most necessary items along. The woman in the apartment became very nervous. She approached my mother and handed her a large set of keys. "You seem to be such a decent lady", she told my mother, "I am sure you will not touch a thing." Boy, was she wrong on the latter count. As soon as the family had left we took the keys and went down to the cellar. Our eyes popped. On shelves all around a tremendous area we discovered hundreds of jars of conserved fruit, chicken, soup, vegetables and other delicacies. There were two motorbikes hanging on hooks and we noticed a second cellar stacked almost to the ceiling with shiny black coal. We thought of the two tablespoons of applesauce and the woman's claim of near-famine.





My mother and I took many trips from the cellar to our room, carrying as much food as we possibly could and then - as we had been doing with our possessions for the last two years - we put it under our bed. We burned our clothing and put on whatever we could find after the job of delousing was thoroughly performed by our liberators. For the longest time I walked around in a brown jacket I found with buttons sporting the initials BDM (Bund Deutscher Mädel) - an organization for girls, similar to the Hitler Youth. My mother created delicious meals which we enjoyed immensely except Eddie, who kept throwing up as the food was still too much and too rich for his stomach.

The bathroom came in handy even though we had to share it with other prisoners who had been assigned rooms in the apartment. The few Hungarian words I still know are thanks to the Jewish Hungarian lady and her father who were living in the house. I used to be fascinated by the way she made noodles from scratch.

We were examined by an American doctor. According to him my brother had contracted tuberculosis. It could not be substantiated at that time, however, because there was no x-ray machine available. Just being free and the lovely weather did wonders for our health. Every day we would go for a small walk in a nearby park where the flowers had just started to bloom. Our walk became longer as the weeks went by.

At this point the village was completely occupied by the American forces and liberated prisoners. Elsewhere in Germany the fighting was still going on, however. It was the end of April. All of the original residents were living away at different locations with family or friends. It did not matter to us where they were but we were constantly reminded of their presence because many pieces of furniture, such as the radio and the piano, carried a large SS emblem.

One day we looked out of the window and saw the retired SS man and his son pull up with a flat-bed truck drawn by two horses.



They stopped in front of the basement of the apartment where they used to live but which was now being used by our family and other former captives. They opened the basement window to the coal cellar and started to shovel coal through the window on to the truck bed. They labored all morning while an American soldier, stationed nearby, observed their efforts. When they were finished and the truck heaped with coal, the soldier walked over to them and asked for their permit from the American authorities allowing them to remove anything from the premises. The man indicated that he did not have a permit and had not known about the regulation. The soldier suggested that he go to the American headquarters in the area and obtain a permit. An hour later the two men reappeared - without a permit, however. The soldier then instructed them to empty the truck and put all the coal back into the cellar. Their job lasted until nightfall. When we questioned the soldier why he had not asked for a permit before they started he smiled and said that he knew they did not have the required document but felt that a good day's work would not hurt them.

It was early May. The three weeks since our liberation had seen us become stronger physically and mentally. It was time to go home. We, as well as the other Dutch people were contacted by the Americans and told to get ready for our return to Holland. Again we rode on trucks for a long distance. We stopped at a small town, Halle, to spend the night. There was a large, wooden building - it served as an entertainment facility for the German population. We entered with many other Dutch people who were to return from all over Germany. Many of these people had worked, willingly and unwillingly as laborers for the German war machine. The building was full of people. The large letters on the front spelled out the motto "Kraft durch Freude" (Strength through joy), We were sitting against each other on the floor, dozing off. My eyes looked up at the projection booth and in the stream of light emanating from it I suddenly saw heavy smoke curls which quickly multiplied. In no time the screams of "fire" woke everybody and there was a rush for the door while burning pieces of wood and hot tar drops were falling on our heads. We managed to get outside and watched while the structure burned down to the ground.





Without any further mishaps we reached the station. At this point the war was not actually over and the armistice had not been signed. There were many soldiers milling about, waiting to be transported to various destinations. We were given some food for the overnight trip and found a corner in an open box car. Day and night we traveled until - by a piercing train whistle - the motorman alerted us to the crossing of the Dutch border.

We arrived in the town of Eindhoven, home of Philips, the large Dutch company manufacturing light bulbs and many kinds of electrical and related products. Registration of all of us took place in the Philips' Veemgebouw, a large building which had been prepared to receive us. We spent the night there on mattresses laid out on the ground. We were now in possession of ration cards, political clearance and had been subjected to another medical examination, including x-ray.

Some of the people of this southern town had volunteered to take in survivors for a few weeks and we were placed with an older couple in a quiet neighborhood. Holland had gone through severe hunger the last years of the war and I cannot shake the feeling that this couple had <sup>NOT</sup> acted out of the goodness of their hearts only. They were given our ration cards but the food we got in return was minimal. I remember the one egg we each got on Sunday morning. The woman of the house treated us to different kinds of "soup", the origin of which I was not able to place. One day she prepared a surprise and gave us a meat soup which did not taste bad but did not taste like any soup I had ever eaten before. Large bones were lying in our deep plates when we were finished. When we asked her what we had just consumed she proudly informed us that the delicious potage had been created out of horse bones. We took her revelation in stride. After all, we had eaten worse.

Finally, after a few weeks we returned to Amsterdam. Then the reality sunk in. The wholesale slaughter which had taken place



defied our most horrible nightmares. Our family had always been large. My father had been one of thirteen children, eleven of which had been married, with children of their own. My mother had been one of three girls; two of her sisters were married, one of whom was the mother of my favorite cousin, Jopie. The only ones we found alive were my grandmother, who had been hidden by a farmer's family; two aunts and one uncle. Thirty-five aunts, uncles and cousins had perished.

\*

You can't go home again they say;  
I tried and I retraced my way  
To find my childhood's joy and pain  
In vain I looked for things I knew;  
My house, my school, maybe a few old friends.  
The city foreign, streets have changed,  
And just the name the same.

\*

The way in which my uncle had managed to survive is a story in itself. He had lived in Belgium during the occupation and his wife and three children had been picked up and were lost. A Catholic, Belgian woman had managed to get him into a hospital as a patient with a "communicable" disease. The doctors and nurses were extremely cooperative, and whenever the Germans came into the hospital to remove my uncle they were warned not to go too close and told to come back a week or so later. The Germans were afraid of catching any contagious disease - especially from a Jew. My uncle was saved by a priest who smuggled an extra set of garments into the hospital. My uncle dressed the part and, bent over a small bible as if reading, he walked, dressed as a priest, out of the hospital past the German guards. The Belgian woman took care of him for the remainder of the war and he later married her. He was my father's oldest brother and died years ago of natural causes.

Holland, before the war, had a Jewish population of about 140,000 which included 30,000 refugees from Germany and Austria. More than half lived in Amsterdam, unencumbered. Many of the Jewish religious institutions received government support.





After the liberation, only about 35,000 Jews were left. Of the 110,000 deported Jews only 5,000 returned and there were an additional 30,000 which had managed to survive by fleeing or being hidden. 75% of the Jewish population in Holland had been wiped out. The Dutch Jewish death rate was the highest in Western Europe surpassed only by Poland in the East.

Although there was collaboration in Holland with the enemy, the above-quoted number does not suggest that this collaboration, percentage-wise, was higher than in other Western European countries. Holland, when overrun and annexed by Germany was- as far as the Jews were concerned - in the worst position in Western Europe. A considerable amount of Belgian Jews had been able to escape to France, a large area of which was unoccupied in the beginning of the war. Many Belgian and French Jews survived in Southern France near the Spanish border, or fled to Italy, where there were large pockets of safety, such as the Vatican. Also, right from the beginning, there was an strong Nazi government put in place in Holland, more powerful than in any of the other occupied Western countries.

Except Norway, the Netherlands remained under German domination longer than any other nation in Western Europe, which fact contributed in large measure to the amount of deported Jews. The Norwegian Jewish population was able to escape to bordering neutral Sweden. Holland was ringed by Germany to the east, occupied Belgium to the south and the North Sea in the north and west.

Upon our return we were totally without means or living quarters. A few of our non-Jewish friends who had kept some of our jewelry, silver and other valuables, were glad to see us and returned what we had entrusted to them. However, two old friends seemed very embarrassed when they saw us. They explained that they had been forced to sell our possessions in exchange for food and had done so because they figured "we would not come back anyway."



Different people took us in. There were many allied soldiers in Amsterdam; the armistice had just been signed and living space was at a premium.

Eddie and I left my mother with former neighbors who offered her a couch to sleep on. He and I managed to get on an army transport train headed for the coast. There were, as yet, no passenger trains in operation. We went to the people who owned the house near the ocean which our parents had rented years in a row. They always lived in the back of the house. They did take us in but our relationship was strained. We had not seen them for many years and they also happened to be one of the families who had not returned all of our valuables to us. The woman, especially, seemed unfriendly. We were each given a little attic room but stayed for two days only. The next day we decided we wanted to return to Amsterdam. However, we were not able to get a train back to the capital. This strengthened our desire to leave all the more. In the small town we made the acquaintance of an American army captain and through his efforts we, and a few soldiers left the day after by jeep which, thankfully, was going in the right direction. We, too, ended up in the neighbors' house; I with my mother on the narrow couch; Eddie got the bed of the little daughter who temporarily moved into her parents' bedroom. At that point we were totally dependent on the charity of others. Most people who had remained in Holland during the war had, themselves, suffered severe hunger and deprivation, especially the last year.

We finally found some sort of home with old friends: a married couple with three children all of whom had been hidden in separate places and survived. They had managed to obtain a small apartment and graciously offered us the large bedroom, a gesture which we gratefully accepted. Their whole family slept in another room and one small bedroom was occupied by a Jewish Canadian soldier who became the first love in my life. We went together to the synagogue and he used to hold my hand while we walked. I felt very secure with him and in my eyes





he was wonderful. When he left to go back home he took the insignia off his beret and to this day I treasure the metal emblem of the Canadian army featuring the words "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense."

\*

Dreams are but feathers in a breeze  
Propelled by hope, held back by fear  
And all it takes is just one sneeze  
To make them quickly disappear.

Dreams are a web of make-believe  
No reason to continue trying  
They maybe help to soften grief  
But never kept a man from dying.

\*

The day arrived that we were assigned an apartment with furniture - courtesy of a collaborator who had been evicted. It was on the second floor of an apartment building in the southern part of Amsterdam, not far from where we had lived before the war. It was an older building and lacked some of the amenities such as a bathroom, necessitating our washing ourselves at the bedroom sink. A small inconvenience, indeed.

Slowly we tried to turn our lives into the direction of some normalcy. Money was tight. We sold whatever valuables had been returned to us. Clothing and food were still very scarce. We received assistance from various sources. One of these was our general practitioner of many years, a devout Christian doctor. He had insisted, at several points during the beginning of the round-up of Jews, to put his life on the line and help us unconditionally. As soon as he heard that we had survived, he contacted various agencies and visited us, bringing food supplies and clothing donated by American families. Textiles were rationed and hard to come by and all we had was no more than "the clothes on our backs."

One of my mother's sisters who, with her husband, had managed to survive the war in the south of France had found our names on a Red Cross list of repatriates. As before the war, they were again living in Brussels. Even though the border between Belgium and



Holland was still closed to civilians, she managed to get across at some point, reaching us with suitcases loaded with foodstuffs and clothing. Conditions in Belgium were better at that time and there was much more available. My mother and I went back with her and I remember arriving late at night in a tiny village on the Dutch side of the border. We stayed in a little inn and about 5 'o clock in the morning we walked into Belgium through a wooded area. My mother and I returned to Amsterdam the same way after we spent a few weeks in Brussels. On the way back I had large pieces of fabric pinned under my skirt as it was totally forbidden to bring anything over the border in view of a thriving black market. At this point we did not scare easily and our resourcefulness knew no bounds.

Eddie and I had to decide on what each of us planned to do with an eye to the future. Happily, his tuberculosis had arrested and an x-ray showed only some scarring at this point. He decided to begin working in the diamond industry. I returned to school to finish my education even though those in my class were two years my junior. My school was not too far away and every day I walked back and forth, sometimes accompanied by new friends I had made. I worked hard and it paid off. Four years later I got my diploma with the second highest average in the graduating class.

These were difficult years. Not one of my former friends had survived, except my close friend Suze. She was not there, though. From what I heard she was recuperating from typhoid which she had contracted after the liberation and was being cared for in a Swiss hospital. I made new friends; especially among the survivors who had been in camps or hidden. We had very much in common that brought and held us together. Jewish youth organizations were formed and I joined, becoming a very able tennis and table tennis player. My mother remarried; my brother created his own circle of friends. These years constituted a time period which served as a bridge between the past, horrendous years and a new, as-normal-as-possible existence. They were extremely difficult years.





Amsterdam had changed. It was no longer as I remembered it and now and then my mind wandered; it might be while walking past an old schoolfriend's house; a particular smell or sound or perhaps a holiday. Often I thought back how it had been, how much had been lost and memories would flood my mind with great clarity. What had happened? How did I find myself in these strange, yet familiar surroundings? And again, what had it been like.

\*

I never saw the darkness fall,  
Surround me in an all  
Impenetrable shroud of gray,  
Encompassing me night and day.

I never heard the darkness glide  
So slowly round my being;  
Hiding the joy that I could see  
Before it slid away from me.

I hope to live the darkness lift,  
To show the good, to bare the gift  
Of all the things of which we dream  
In daylight's sunshine, morning's gleam.

But should by chance the darkness stay,  
Forever threatening my way,  
I'll try to live on and to walk  
Without a light straight through the dark.

\*

I was born in Amsterdam, Holland. Tracing back to great-grandparents on both my mother's and father's side, they had all been Dutch natives. My birth was just after the stock market crash in 1929, completing our family which already had a son, my brother Eddie, age 2½.

My earliest memories date from when I was about 4 years old. The knowledge of my life before that time came mainly from my mother who filled me in on the basics - my shape, habits and behavior as an infant. My birth had been more difficult because I had been



"chubby and round" as opposed to my brother's being "long and skinny" upon arrival. Secondhand I learned that I had been a difficult sleeper. My mother had to stay with me every night until I fell asleep. Furthermore, legend has it that I developed a small wine-colored spot on the side of my face when I was about a week old, necessitating regular trips to the children's hospital where it was burned off with an electric needle. No small matter for that era; almost equal to a major operation on a newborn at that time. My mother persevered - the doctor kept on burning and the spot eventually disappeared, giving way to a resulting scar which got bigger as my face grew. It never bothered me and now the scar is hardly noticeable. If nothing had been done, half my face would be wine-colored.

Most of Holland's Jews lived in the larger cities; mainly Amsterdam. The greater part of the population belonged to Protestant denominations of which the Dutch Reformed Church was the strongest. About 40 percent was Roman Catholic with the largest concentration in the southern provinces. Comparatively, the percentage of Jews was extremely small but because of the freedom they had always enjoyed, they played an important part in the fields of science, the arts and politics. All the Jews we knew were Orthodox and ours was a very religious household. Within walking distance were two Orthodox synagogues and one Reformed temple which had made its entry mainly due to the arrival of German Jews in the thirties.

My father worked in the diamond industry. Many Dutch and Belgian Jews made their living in that particular field.

Life was peaceful. We got along with neighbors, whatever religion. There was little overt anti-semitism and, in general, the country was considered liberal and progressive in its thinking and tolerant in its actions especially toward those who experienced oppression in their own countries. For centuries Holland had maintained an open-border policy for people persecuted elsewhere. As a matter of fact, it had been the first country in the western world to accept Jews in government in the 17th century. Many different religions were





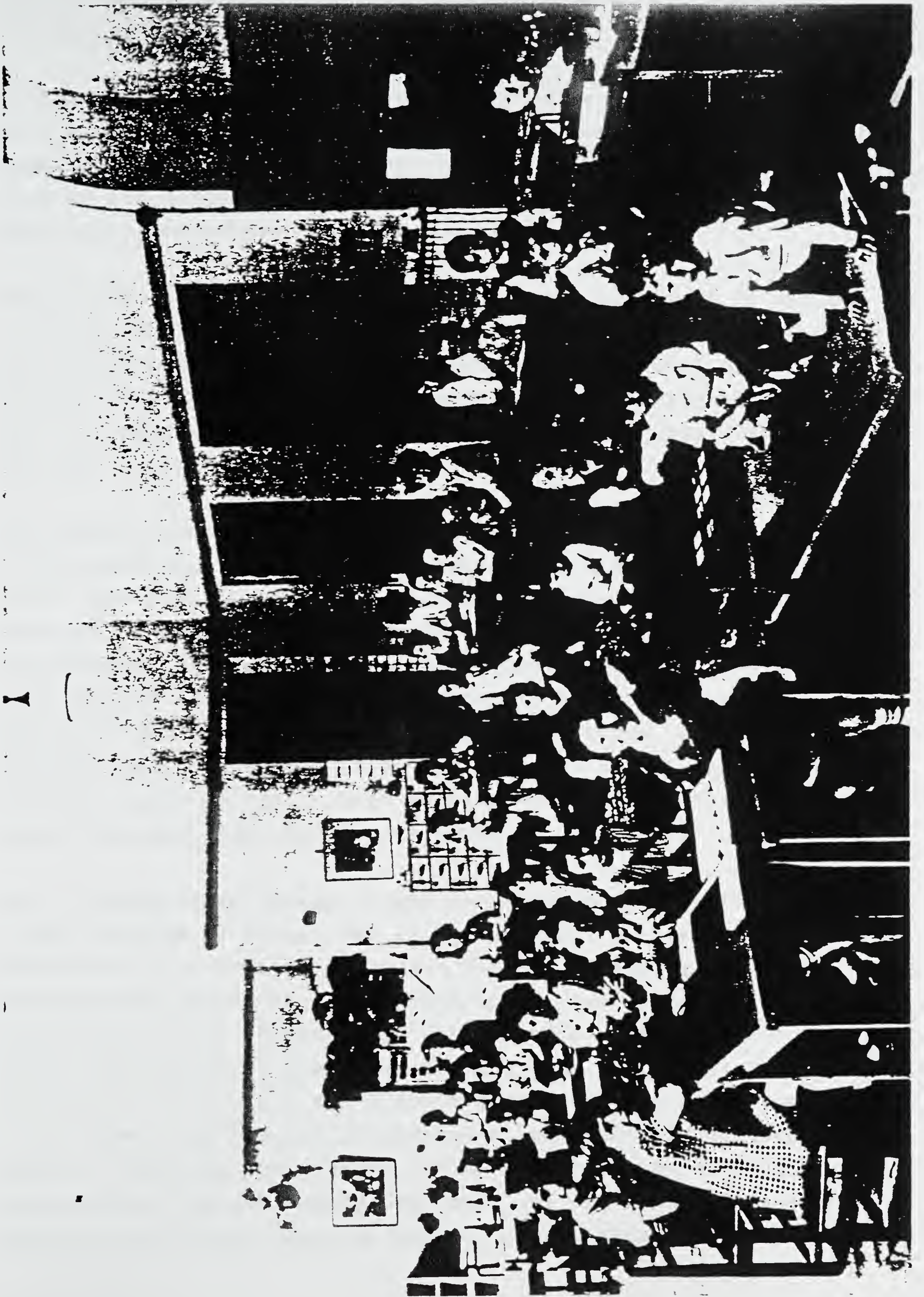
practiced and respected. At the time of the Inquisition people had come from Spain. During the period of the pogroms there had been a large influx of Polish and Russian Jews and starting in the early thirties, German Jews found a haven of tolerance.

Jewish laws were scrupulously adhered to in our household. My brother and I joined my father in synagogue services on Friday night and Saturday morning. We both attended Hebrew school, twice during the week and on Sunday morning. My father was very active in politics as well <sup>as</sup> as many Jewish causes. He was on various committees of organizations ~~dedicated~~ to the betterment of conditions for Jewish orphans, widows and the persecuted. He also was one of the founders of the Mizrachi, the Orthodox Zionist organization in Holland and he actually met my mother at one of the gatherings. In the winter, on Friday afternoons, the teacher used to send observant Jewish children home early for the beginning of the Sabbath.

The outset of my school career was not exactly successful. My parents enrolled me in public school when I was about 4½ but I carried on to such a degree, once there, that they had to keep me home for another six months. Then I entered kindergarten at the 6th Montessori School, right across the street from our house. In those days the innovative concept of the Montessori system was considered very progressive. The principal theory ~~of~~ its method was that ~~each~~ student had the opportunity to proceed with the learning schedule at his or her own pace. Individual help was given, as needed, by the teacher. Each classroom contained three classes, or groups. When I was in first grade, second, as well as third-grade groups were in the same classroom. Learning tools were creative and appealing to children of different ages. There were no benches but small tables and chairs, placed together in group settings. Each classroom had a little kitchen. The girls in the lower grades wore aprons. In back of our school was a small garden where we all participated in the growing of strawberries. Also we had a pond with jumping frogs. Soft talking was allowed in class and no report cards or grades were given. Our principal was Mrs. K., an awe-inspiring lady. A woman principal in those days was rather unusual. Male principals were











the norm. Maybe the fact that Maria Montessori had started it all was an instrumental ingredient.

There were a few Jewish children in my group who had fled Germany with their families. One of these was Anne Frank who was one group ahead of me. We became friends; went to each other's birthday parties and remained in the same classroom until Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend public school.

Family life was very close. Every Saturday afternoon we walked to visit my grandparents and my uncles and aunts would also be there with their offspring, so there would be plenty of cousins to play with. An unmarried aunt was living with my grandparents. She ran the household and every week she baked large sheets of the most delicious butter cake.

Our Sundays also were spent in family setting. We would go for a long walk with my parents - sometimes to a playground in the park - and then be treated to ice cream. Cake and ice cream were not an everyday specialty in Holland and doled out only on weekends or special occasions. Sometimes my father would take me fishing on a Sunday afternoon at a nearby stream. We'd bicycle together, armed with sticks, rope, corks, sewing pins as hooks and, of course, bread for bait. I do not remember ever catching anything but I loved sitting there, eyes glued to the cork's movement just in case it would go down.

In our house every special event was a celebration. Early Friday morning my mother was in the kitchen, preparing the Sabbath meal as well as the meals for the following day. No cooking was allowed on the Sabbath in our house and the stove could not be lit. We had what was called a Sabbath oven - a metal contraption fitting over the gas jets which were left burning for 24 hours. And I don't want to forget the Seders in our home; the frantic preparations; the delivery of large boxes of Passover foods which, in my memory tasted different from anything we ate during the year. At the Seder the table would be set for at least 20 people. Every year my parents





invited a few boys from the Jewish orphanage. Moreover, each and every unmarried, lonely individual within our circle of friends or acquaintances would be there. Sometimes there were various people at the table I did not even know but that did not <sup>c</sup>distract from the special atmosphere, the wonderful meal and the beautiful way in which my father conducted the Seder service.

Having a birthday was the social event of the year. On that day you brought a large, decorated basket to school containing candies, wrapped in colorful napkins tied with small ribbons. The children in the class would sing a special birthday song and then you would go around with the basket and each child - the teacher first, of course - would take a sweet offering. After school, this would be followed by a party at home to which your best friends were invited. The table would be festively set. We would play games and party favors were distributed. In very special cases the parents of the birthday child had arranged for a clown, magician or puppet show to entertain the group.

I had many friends in school and at intermission or after class we played marbles, rope-jumping, many different ball games and, of course, in the winter there was abundant snow which kept us occupied for hours. Ice-skating could almost be considered the national sport in a country so replete with water. The real national sport was soccer and sometimes we went to see a game in the stadium or we listened in front of the radio, rooting for our team. In my thoughts I can still hear the voice of Han Hollander, the famous announcer, describe the play detail by detail and then, suddenly, yelling "Goooooal"!

In 1939 I celebrated my 10th birthday. Around me there was a lot of talk about someone named Adolf Hitler, the Jews in Germany and then the invasion of Poland. Much of it was not too clear to me at the time. During the night of May 10, 1940 we woke to the sound of anti-aircraft artillery. Germany had suddenly struck and invaded our country. A paratrooper attack on The Hague the first day, intended to capture Queen Wilhelmina and paralyze the government, did not succeed. The royal family



and a few cabinet members fled to London and a government in exile was created. To bring the Dutch to their knees the Germans bombed Rotterdam. Eight hundred people were killed in that attack. On May 15, resistance formally ended with capitulation by the small Dutch army and total occupation under Reich Commissioner Seiss-Inquart was established.

German tanks and armored vehicles drove through the streets of Amsterdam but there were very few people to greet them. Of course, every country had its traitors and there were Germans and members of the National Socialist Bund happily waving and pledging full cooperation in collaborating with the invaders. Many Dutch fishing vessels escaped across the North Sea to England carrying as many people as they could hold. Dutch Jews, especially, were apprehensive and feared the worst. They tried to flee by various routes. Some went south to Belgium and from there to France or Spain in their quest to reach the United States. Thousands flocked into the <sup>port</sup>~~harbor~~ of IJmuiden, near Amsterdam, trying to get onto any vessel leaving for England, but only hundreds managed to reach a safe harbor.

There was a run on food stores. People began hoarding the most basic of staples: flour, sugar, salt - anything that would not spoil for an extended time. Later, rationing cards put a stop to that practice but gave rise to the creation of a flourishing black market where anything could be bought for a price.

Panic was everywhere and rumors were rampant. People burned whatever they thought would incriminate them. Piles of anti-Nazi newspapers and literature, English books and dictionaries went up in smoke. Many Jewish families committed suicide. Among them was the whole household of Beppie P., my girl friend, whose father was a well-respected ophthalmologist. I often played at her house and then one morning I heard that Beppie, her sister, brother and parents had died. I did not understand how they could have done something so final. It was the first time in my life that suicide had touched me, but it would not be the last.





At night especially did the war intrude on our sleep. The windows had to be completely covered with dark shades so that no light could lead the way or give signals to the English pilots flying overhead to Germany on a bombing mission. Night after night the eerie air raid sirens sounded. We would quickly get up and gather in the center hall of our house. When we heard the siren's single tone we knew it was again safe to go to bed. This went on nightly, sometimes more than once. In the morning we would go outside and search for pieces of anti-aircraft artillery shells lying in the street. It became a sport to collect those souvenirs and to see who could find the largest chunks.

Strange rumors would surface. One of these stands out in my mind. The story went that there had been a secret landing of English paratroopers who had put a mark on the doorposts of certain homes. We were scrubbing our doors and posts in no time in an effort to remove the sign of collaboration with the English - even though no unusual markings were noticeable. Fear of German retribution succeeded in making us act in the most unreasonable fashion.

Life had unalterably changed and there was a beginning. It was the start of the termination of millions and millions of lives.

\*

If all at once the world would shatter  
And oceans flood the anxious shore  
To me it really would not matter  
It might look better than before.

If sun and moon would slowly fade  
Before my eyes their brightness die  
If no new stars were being made,  
Their light extinguished in the sky.

If all the pieces we would gather  
And pandemonium would reign  
To clean it up I would not bother  
Because their efforts were in vain.

\*



## LAWS AGAINST THE JEWS

In one of the first measures against the Jews, in a law entitled "Avoidance of Cruel Practices in Slaughter", ritual slaughter was abolished in August 1940. The new regulation called for the stunning of warm-blooded animals before slaughter. Actually, no one was surprised by this measure as anti-ritual slaughter legislation had been among the first passed by the Nazis in Germany itself. The question was, why did ritual slaughter worry anti-semites to such a large extent? It was actually the most humane and direct way of killing the animal. Did they intend to give it some sinister meaning?

September 1940 brought the prohibition of publishing Jewish newspapers with the exception of one, "The Jewish Weekly." At the same time it was decreed that Jews could no longer maintain or be appointed to Dutch government positions and all civil servants had to fill out forms indicating if they were Jewish or married to a Jewish spouse. Suspension of Jewish civil servants in November 1940 followed, including that of Lodewijk Visser, President of the Supreme Court. In December 1940, a Jewish coordinating committee was formed, chaired by Visser.

Laws and regulations followed each other in quick succession, each one tightening the noose a little more. October 1940 was the month when registration took place of businesses owned or operated wholly or in part by Jews, or in which Jews had financial interests. This registration was a follow-up of an earlier decree which directed recording of all businesses owned by Jews or having even one Jewish partner on the date of May 9, 1940. These included, among others, the Netherlands Bank, which had one Jewish director. All these laws threatened heavy fines to be imposed in case of non-compliance.

December 1940 saw the prohibition of employing "persons of German nationality or of German and related blood" in Jewish households. This was followed on January 10, 1941 by a decree which would later prove to be the most disastrous; the registration of all





Jews; full Jews; half-Jews; quarter-Jewish, Orthodox or non-observant. All Jews thus defined were instructed to register with the mayor or Census Office within 4 weeks in writing, in return for which each person received a yellow card at the price of one guilder, payable in advance. Failure to register was punishable with five years' imprisonment and/or confiscation of property. With few exceptions all Jews registered, not anticipating the horrifying outcome.

In February 1941 it became clear to Jews - and non-Jews alike - that the pogrom had begun in earnest. For the first time Jews were being robbed and beaten on a large scale. The Germans had decided to give the Dutch Nazis free rein. Violence was mainly organized by the WA, the stormtroopers of the NSB (National Socialist Bund). The Jews refused to knuckle under and formed the first resistance groups in the country, greatly encouraged by support given them by their non-Jewish friends and neighbors. In one of the major fights that occurred in those days, a WA man by the name of Koot was wounded and later died. The German authorities demanded that Jews surrender to the police any weapons in their possession without delay. Dissatisfied with the amount of weapons submitted an ultimatum to the Jewish community followed. Every Jew had to disarm him or herself before February 24, 4 PM. However, the result was not much better; not many weapons were handed over. On February 22 and 23 the first razzias (raids) were held in the Jewish quarter. About 400 Jewish hostages between the ages of twenty and thirty-five were arrested. All of them later died in the Mauthausen concentration camp. This capture and deportation was largely responsible for one of the most heroic episodes in Dutch history: the famous strike of February 25, 1941 which paralyzed all transport and industry. Work in factories, business, railways, docks had come to a complete standstill. The Germans retaliated by arresting hundreds of people; 4 strikers were sentenced to death; martial law was imposed. The Germans succeeded in stifling any further overt resistance in Holland for the duration





of the occupation. A Central Office for Jewish Emigration was set up in Holland to be serving as a model for other countries - the Zentralstelle für Jüdische Auswanderung. The strike of February 25, 1941 went down in history books as a valiant act of sabotage by non-Jews in a feeling of unity with their Jewish brethren. A large monument depicting a dockworker was erected after the war in memory of this courageous stand.

Also in February, the Jewish Council was formed as responsible representatives of Amsterdam Jewry. The joint presidents were Abraham Asscher, a prominent businessman and Professor David Cohen. We can actually say that from then on we all contributed to the intrinsic murderous plans of the German death machine. It can be described to have been executed in well-thought-out phases, to wit identification, registration, centralization, isolation, leading to deportation. What we then did not know was that the next stage was to be cremation. The amazing part was that we all cooperated and were now registered with names, addresses, and any other pertinent information required. All Jews had registered with the Jewish Council. It was an indication of lack of insight - or rather foresight. Who could even slightly imagine what it would eventually lead to.

The general issue of identity cards began in Amsterdam in April, 1941. Jewish identity cards bore the letter J in large, black type. This phase, in the strongest way until now, introduced the separation element - the segregation of the Dutch Jews and the Dutch gentiles at a glance.

Decrees followed each other in fast order. Jews were not allowed to move from Amsterdam or to travel; no Jew could hold a cultural post; stock exchange was forbidden as were public parks. Jewish professionals, such as doctors and lawyers, had to cease doing professional work for anyone but Jews. No longer were theaters available for the Jewish public, nor public swimming pools, public transportation, public assemblies, museums, libraries, etc. Boarding houses and stores were only open to Jews if they displayed the "for Jews only" sign. A curfew



forbade Jews to be outside between the hours of 8 PM and 6 AM. Shopping in Jewish stores only was allowed between 3 and 5 PM. Fraternization with Christian friends and neighbors was forbidden.

A financial organization, Lippmann, Rosenthal & Co. was used by the Germans to receive Jewish cash, cheques and bank deposits. All Jewish property and businesses were taken over by a German organization which could also authorize non-Jewish persons to take possession.

Up to this point Jewish children as a whole had been left alone. Being very young, we took the various regulations in stride, although we felt an increasing tension in the household. Our parents were worrying and had become very serious. Then we too, became directly involved. During the summer of 1941, schools had to submit lists of all Jewish pupils attending. At the end of that school year, our principal Mrs. Kuperus, asked that all Jewish children - among which Anne Frank and I - stay after school. She then told us that starting the next school year, we would no longer be able to attend our school but would have to go to an all-Jewish school. At that point Anne had finished her 6th group and was ready for high school. I, being one group lower, would still have to go to another elementary school for one year. My new school was about 10 blocks from the house and every morning, my friend Suze and I walked to the all-Jewish Montessori school which was staffed by Jewish teachers only, and headed by a wonderful, grey-haired lady, Mrs. Joosten, who had been a student of Maria Montessori and who became my teacher in this last year.

Jews had been registered and identified. The separation from the rest of the population was in full swing. The Jewish Council functioned smoothly as go-between and interpreter of all the different ordinances. Actually, the Council operated in cooperation with the Germans. This should not be considered collaboration by choice, but rather a desperate effort to create as little friction as possible so as not to evoke the German wrath and thereby saving Jewish lives.





My life continued with as little interruption as possible, mainly thanks to my parents who tried to make each day as normal as they could for us by not making us part of their fearful existence. I enjoyed school and played with my friends. My father, the eternal optimist, kept on insisting that the war would be over in six weeks. How wrong he proved to be. In retrospect maybe it was better that he did not know that it was only the beginning of the most monstrous horror perpetrated in the twentieth century - or any previous century for that matter.

Suze and I continued in our last year of elementary school in the Montessori system. There were many things we could not do as they were forbidden to Jews. We did create our own entertainment and there were many concerned grown-ups who participated in the effort to keep Jewish youth occupied. Suze and I created a terrarium composed of different kinds of plants and moss. We duly impressed the teacher, Mrs. Joosten, and our effort gave rise to her explanations and facts of plant life in a botany lecture of many hours, given in an extremely interesting manner. The famous leader of a children's choir in Amsterdam, no longer working because of his faith, assembled as many Jewish children as could fit in one of the large rooms of the synagogue on the week-end. He taught us many happy and beautiful songs and in my mind it sounded as not even the Vienna Boys' Choir could ever make a melody spring forth. The more the general situation around us changed, the more grateful we became to those people who were willing to give us moments of happiness, to keep our minds directed to joyful happenings.

I could not help but notice that one day our Jewish friends across the street had disappeared. Even in school, some of the children would be absent and not return.

It is strange; but as I am writing, my mind goes back and my memories of those days in particular seem to be standing out. Today I am still able to sing every word and every melody we learned then.



\*

Why should I cry  
For Romeo and Juliet  
Or for two million children  
Mowed away that day but yet  
Those two are far apart.

One should cry for a broken heart,  
Intentions foiled, a new dress spoiled,  
A car that does not start.

Why should I weep  
When deep inside me the refrain  
Of pain repeats a mournful song.

How long will I deny that I should cry  
For thankfulness of being me  
And being free to give  
Direction to my tears.

I do cry but my tears I hide,  
I laugh out loud, but cry inside.

\*

The actual, first deportation of Jews began in late 1941 when the Jewish Council received instructions to supply a quota of unemployed Jews for shipment to "labor camps." An ever-increasing quota had to be filled. Moreover, people, especially young and middle-aged men, started to disappear from the streets.

The wearing of a yellow star, a relic of medieval barbarity, was decreed on April 29, 1942. These pieces of cloth had been introduced in Germany in September 1941, as well as in Czechoslovakia. The law was put into effect simultaneously in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The most important regulations were the following:

1. All Jews appearing in public must wear a Jewish star.
2. The Jewish star shall be a black, six-pointed star on yellow





material, the size of a palm, and bearing the black inscription "Jood". The star shall be clearly visible and affixed to the outer clothing over the left breast.

The Jewish Council was charged with distribution of the stars. Every Jew was entitled to four stars maximum at a price of 4 cents each. Children under 6 were exempt for the time being. Furthermore, the stars had to be sewn on with stitches so small that it would be difficult to get a pencil point in between. Fastening the stars with pins was a punishable offense. The reaction of the Dutch public to the yellow star was extremely profound - the result of a strong sense of solidarity. Many non-Jews started wearing a yellow star. Some had the word "Protestant" or "Roman Catholic" inscribed.

The noose was tightening and people just plainly disappeared. Whether they had gone into hiding or had been taken by the Nazis - we did not know. At about that point in time we were contacted by a gentile friend of ours, active in the underground movement, who insisted that we too go into hiding, each of us with a different family in the country. My father rejected the offer. First of all, he wanted the family to stay together and, furthermore, he was still convinced that the war would be over soon.

No longer did we possess any Hebrew books, prayer books or books authored by Jews. They had been my father's pride and we had owned an extensive collection. By German decree we had brought these volumes to various specified places in the city where they were burned in large fires. Richard Wagner's martial compositions became very popular with the Germans, the more so because he had been known as an avid anti-semiter. Works by Jewish poets, such as Heine disappeared from German textbooks. Would it be possible to destroy a people by nullifying any and all contributions they had made to civilization? They certainly expended the effort, which would not end before one third of a race of civilized people had been wiped off the earth,



June 1942 saw the decree forbidding every form of outdoor sports, including rowing, canoeing, swimming, tennis, soccer, to Jews. That same month it became unlawful for Jews to buy their vegetables in any but Jewish markets. This was followed in July with the seizure of all bicycles belonging to Jews.

In the beginning of 1942, centralization of Jews in Amsterdam started. Jews from other parts of the country were to move to the capital and within one year, Jewish residence in the Netherlands - with the exception of Amsterdam - was forbidden. Alien Jews were sent to the camps of Vught and Westerbork, both within Holland.

The period beginning in July 1942 and ending in September 1943 saw the wholesale deportation of Dutch Jewry. Some Jews had been deported earlier in various raids - some Jews survived in Holland after September 1943, but the period mentioned is the one during which almost all round-ups took place, serving to rid Holland of its Jews.

Organized deportation took place between July 14 and 17, 1942 when 4,000 Jews were sent to Germany. Exempt were persons whose names were submitted by the Jewish Council. Those were people essential to the life of the Jewish community and the running thereof. The power handed over to the Jewish Council became almost God-like. Members of the Council were alternately hated or loved, depending on whether their good graces kept you home as "essential" or had you put on the next deportation list. The Germans must have thoroughly enjoyed their "divide and conquer" tactics. How much better to have the Jews claw and beg amongst themselves.





\*

They said I was a Jew  
They handed me a star  
They put me in a cattle car  
And shipped me far from home.

They said I was a Jew  
Which meant I was not fit to live  
My life - to please them - I should give  
My only life.

They said I was a Jew  
And slew with callous disregard  
They tore my body, soul apart  
And let me lie to die.

My body once again is whole  
But what about my soul.

\*

To achieve the goal of 4,000 deportees a week, call-up notices were sent out by special delivery on July 5, 1942. These papers indicated that the persons mentioned would be put to work after deportation. The age limit was approximately 40 at the top, but teenagers of 15 were called up also. Included were instructions on what to take along, where to show up and at what time. My brother, just 15, as well as one of our cousins received a notice. My brother's backpack was ready but at this point my mother sprang into action. She refused to let him go. She made various trips to speak to Abraham Asscher - who happened to be my father's uncle - and implored, begged and threatened him to use his power to keep my brother home; the same power he was using to protect the members of the Jewish Council who had obtained notices. At the same time, our gentile doctor visited us late at night and suggested that he inject my brother with scarlet fever bacteria. The Germans were very afraid of that disease and in that case the house would be quarantined. Although my parents were very appreciative of the doctor's offer, they did not accept it. About two hours before my brother had to leave, a member of the Jewish Council came to our house with an "Ausweis", exempting Eddie for the time being. How-



ever, my cousin who was to go with my brother appeared a little later, all packed, not with clothes, but books. He was extraordinarily intelligent and, at the age of 21 had already obtained a doctorate. To him books were more important than clothing. My parents were heartbroken to have to tell them that he would have to go by himself but he told them not to worry. His parents had been deported a few months before and he said that my brother was staying with his parents and he was on his way to his parents. We never saw him or my aunt and uncle again.

August 6, 1942 was the day on which the Germans decided on a raid in Amsterdam. This day was called "Black Thursday" or "The Raid of the 2,000." Jews were picked up in the street or in their houses. The reason given was that too few Jews were reporting for deportation. This was followed on August 9 by a raid in the southern part of Amsterdam during which another large amount of Jews were taken. Our whole family was picked up in that raid and taken to the Adema van Scheltema Place, an area surrounded by a large brick wall. It was a very hot day. Each person's papers were checked and taken. Aus der Füntten, Commander of German Security Police would now and then call off names of people who could leave for one or another reason. We stood squashed together for a good part of the day. A few people fainted. We had gotten hold of a runner for the Jewish Council and told him to get in touch with Asscher to try and obtain our release. It took hours and hours. Some food was handed out in the middle of the day. People were packed together, standing and standing. My mother, as always very inventive, struck on an idea. She told my father that she would simulate fainting and that such action might lead to our release. If my mother would not have been a housewife first she might have made a great actress. My father was unimpressed. He answered her that she could do whatever she wanted, but he would remain standing there just in case our names were called. Within a few minutes, before my mother had a chance to initiate her plan, our names were called. It was evening and well past the time that Jews were allowed outside, our curfew time. However, we were given an "Ausweiss", allowing us to go home, as well as an additional paper guaranteeing our freedom from transportation





for the next 120 days. Of course, my father figured that it was all we needed because the war would be over long before that time. When we left the Place we stopped at the nearby residence of our ear, nose and throat specialist who had known us since we were born. There we talked for a while and had something to eat and drink, after which we walked home, Ausweiss in hand, should we be stopped.

★

Who'll walk this lonesome road with me;  
That trail which stretches endlessly  
Ahead; where thorny bushes, quicksand, weeds  
Are interspersed with flowers sweet  
And now and then the trill of joyful birds.

Who'll walk that treacherous road with me;  
Holding my hand, setting me free  
Of strain, regret and misery.  
Who knows just where the road may end;  
Many more miles or yonder bend.

We have to keep on trodding, though;  
No turning back, no path to go  
Where we can rest or change our course;  
No satisfaction or remorse  
Can help us find a shorter way.

Walking together, you and I  
You'll make me bold when I am shy  
I'll bring you smiles were you to cry.  
When finally the end we see,  
How lovely that you walked with me.

★



No more carefree days for my brother, myself or any of our friends. The all-pervasive fear had touched us also. Any moment now we could be taken with or without our parents, at home, at school or in the street. Like most Jews, we tried to draw as little attention to ourselves as possible, to act inconspicuously.

Identity cards for Jews would not only have the letter "J", but for many there was an additional stamp on their papers, indicating an occupation or special position which, for the time being, would exempt them from deportation. Examples were persons working for the Jewish Council, Jewish Schools, Jews married to non-Jews and having children, baptized Jews and those working in industries lucrative and important to Germany, such as uniforms, furs, diamonds, old metal, etc. Some people, not belonging to any of these groups, would offer a great amount of money for obtaining such exemption. However, in the end none of these stamps proved worth anything. By working in the diamond industry my father obtained the most-coveted 120,000 number stamp which guaranteed freedom from deportation until September 27, 1943. (As will be described later, all these people were arrested on September 29, 1943.)

The razzias continued. Jews were picked up at night as per lists so conveniently put together by the Jewish Council. The Germans came to our house or stopped us in the street at least 12 times. For a long time the 120,000 stamp did its job. Late at night, lying in my bed, I would hear the boots of the Germans, helped by the Dutch Police, German Nazi Parti officials and Dutch SS-men as they stomped their way to our house. I would hear my parents trying to keep them talking and offering them liquor - which would often make them stay for an extended time -. Sometimes they would sit in our living room most of the night, after which they would leave empty-handed, so to say.

Centralization and isolation of the Jewish population segment continued. All Jews had to move to the older, eastern, less desirable part of Amsterdam and each family was assigned a small apartment. This town section could be completely closed off because the Amstel River ran around it and there was only one large bridge to gain access. The ghetto was established in no





time due to German efficiency and facilitated by the Jewish Council.

I mention the Jewish Council rather often and in a less than favorable fashion. Looking back I have come to the conclusion that most of the members - at least those that did not misuse their power - were victims like all of us. Originally, the thoughts of the presidents and most important participants must have embraced the idea of not making waves; not incurring the wrath of the Germans, this coupled with an honest desire to try and help their fellow-Jews. Of course, later on, the Council's efforts would prove to have been of immeasurable assistance in the execution of the "final solution."

The amazing thing was that people still did not want to believe the final destination for those deported. Well-planned deception aided this illusion. We all heard about letters and postcards received by some, originating from places east, telling about working conditions being hard but food, as well as living conditions as adequate. Furthermore, the "Jewish Weekly" gave instructions as to how to pack and what to take along. Everybody had a backpack at the ready, well stenciled with name and further details and filled with clothing, blankets and other necessities.

After graduating from elementary school at the end of 1942, I had started attending the Jewish Lyceum, a secondary school located in the old center of Amsterdam. It was a long walk from our small apartment in the east of Amsterdam, at least an hour each way. My friend Suze and I would always go together. She possessed a scooter with air-filled tires and we used to put our books over the handlebar in a leather bag and stand together on the scooter, one in front of the other. When she pushed with her left foot, my right was called into action and vice versa. We had it down to a science and used to fly over the road which had little traffic, since there were hardly any automobiles and even bicycles were in short supply. No Jew could own a bicycle, but a scooter, that was a different story.



We all brought our lunch to school and used to eat in class at our desk, in deep discussion over what teacher was gone; which classmate was suddenly absent, and wondering whether the missing had been arrested or gone underground. Nearby, in the Lepelstraat (Spoon Street) there was a pickle factory. Many a time we would saunter to the little building, buying pickles and sour onions which were devoured with gusto. In the afternoon classes, after such an outing, the pickle and onion smell would be overpowering. The teachers would make faces but not say anything, realizing that there were few enjoyable experiences left to their charges.

Very often, in mid-winter the building was totally unheated. There just was no coal. On those days it was just as cold inside the classroom as on the outside. Nobody went home, though. We got through the day with coats, hats and gloves on.

\*

I have been sitting on a ledge  
In front of me there is an edge  
In back of me it's high to climb  
And often I'm attempting to get up  
While at the same time trying not to fall.

I seem to stay right on the spot.  
Climb I just can't; fall I may not.

\*





That first year of my secondary education was a strange year. The classes were small and every day more children and teachers would disappear, having been "picked up" or gone into hiding. However, the quality of our education was unequalled. Our teachers were well-known professors who were no longer allowed to teach at universities. The level of educational power they supplied was impressive. In those crazy months they taught with a vengeance and we learned and took tests. We were graded and made believe that getting an education under the existing conditions was the most normal thing in the world.

One memory of that time will always be with me. For our French teacher, Professor Premsela, we had to learn to recite a French poem by heart. It was Victor Hugo's "Après la Bataille". (After the Battle.) It was a long poem, but we all managed to get it into our heads. When we had mastered the recitation, our next assignment was to translate the work into the Dutch language and create a Dutch poem, adhering as closely as possible to the original French contents. The winner would be allowed to enter his or her creation, signed, into a book kept by the school, containing unusual accomplishments by students. I remember that the final contest was between my Dutch poem and that of another student but mine was voted best, and I entered my brainchild with pride in the school book. Many years later, the French poem proved to be of value to me as I recited it for my final High School exam in the French language and received the highest grade possible for my efforts. Now and then I wonder if that original book of special accomplishments survived the war and is still in existence somewhere.

In January of 1943 there was a raid on the Jewish mental hospital in Apeldoorn which was emptied of 1,100 patients and a staff of 400 in a bestial manner. Continuing along these lines, the Germans proudly accomplished emptying Jewish orphanages, old age homes and hospitals and demanded help from the OD's, members of a Jewish Special Corps from the Westerbork holding camp.

In May 1943 the rate of deportation accelerated. Seven thousand members of the Jewish Council were called up for "employment"





in Germany. Only 500 showed up. The Germans reacted by sealing off the Jewish quarter and picking up 3,435 Jews, which was followed by more intensive manhunts. By summer of 1943 there was only a small amount of Jews left. In the ghetto there were many empty apartments from where people had been taken at totally unexpected moments, during dinner or possibly at night, in their first hours of sleep. I looked at the broken windows through which torn curtains were blowing in the wind. Inside those apartments the mess was unbelievable. People had to leave everything behind, except a backpack. Then, as soon as they had been taken out, lowlives from surrounding areas would come in and take whatever they could carry. The remainder of furniture and things of value would be removed within a day or so by Puls, a company charged with emptying Jewish houses and sending contents to Germany. It was very depressing, especially since more and more apartments around us looked like that.

During that summer, other Jewish teenagers and I used to walk for an hour or so and spend the day working in a large vegetable field at the end of the ghetto. We worked very hard, especially when it came to digging out potatoes but our satisfaction lay in returning home, carrying some potatoes, beans and other vegetables. There remained, of course, always the fear that a German truck would stop near our garden and pick us all up.

To illustrate insanity in progress, and accepted seriously: I remember that at a certain point Jews were not allowed to have fruit in the house. We had some now and then, brought to us by a non-Jewish friend from a farm outside Amsterdam. Engraved in my mind is the sight of my father flushing peaches down the toilet while a razzia was in progress outside our apartment. It took many years for me to bring experiences back to normal perspective and realize how insane and upside-down our world had become.

In retrospect, the worst part of it is that the way we had to live at that time had almost seemed normal to me. I had been



10 years old when all this had started. The slow, but steady persecution had been executed in a devious manner; planned out to the last detail. The succession of decrees against the Jewish population - every next one worse than the previous one - imbued life with a kind of normalcy, crazy as it may sound. Being a child, it seemed to me that it had always been this way. This perverted perception could only have come from the mind of a youngster who had not as yet experienced growing to maturity under normal circumstances. My parents and other adults did, of course, feel the fear, rage and powerlessness of the situation. However, the palpable anxiety of the adults around me was infectious

\*

When did the hurt begin  
At birth or later  
At some undefinable point  
It crept so slowly forward  
Ever growing like a cocoon  
Evelops a caterpillar;  
Totally and efficiently.

How did the hurt begin;  
Did it develop from the inside  
And work its way out or was it created  
By strange sources and touched us  
Beyond our control.

When will the hurt end;  
Will it dissolve on its own  
Could it be removed by others  
Might I kill it myself  
Or will it grow victorious  
And kill me.

\*





September came around again. It was 1943. I had just started my sophomore year at the Jewish Lyceum. The day was September 29, the eve of Rosh Hashanah. My mother had been busy all day preparing food for the holiday. We did not have a refrigerator and, to prevent spoilage and keep it cold, most of it had been placed on our small balcony under gauze netting. Hopefully, the new year would bring better times, liberation and freedom of fear.

It was about 10 PM; well after curfew, and I was sleeping. Although there were now many empty, plundered apartments near us, our small ghetto still contained a considerable amount of Jews, most of whom were exempt from deportation because of their work for the German war machine.

A rumbling noise, as that of many trucks passing in the street, woke me. Searchlights pierced the darkness of my room with lightbeams intersecting each other. Loud German voices could be heard outside.

There was a young, newly-married couple living on one side of us. Their parents occupied an apartment on the other side. Suddenly, through the night, I heard the young woman yelling, "Mother, we are being taken away." Her piercing scream sounded eerie and frightening. The ominous sound of heavy boots outside our apartment could now be heard. The bell rang. My father opened the door to a green-uniformed German soldier and a Dutch police collaborator. They told us to be ready in 10 minutes. The German soldier came upstairs and planted himself in the middle of our living room, his rifle between his knees. The nightmare had come closer and closer and was now actually sitting a few feet away from me. My teeth were chattering but I quickly got dressed and grabbed my backpack, ready to go with my mother, father and brother.

It was the dreaded moment expected for a long time. Our backpacks had been standing ready in a corner. However, it had been a rather cool September and I had taken sweaters



out of the prepared clothing and worn them daily. As a consequence, and, because I had forgotten about that important detail, I left the house without warm clothing, except what I was wearing.

Outside pandemonium reigned. All the Jews who had been living in the area were standing there with baggage. Parents were holding on to their children who had been rudely awakened from their sleep. It was the night that the Germans took from 3,000 to 5,000 "indispensable" Jews from their homes. The total liquidation of Dutch Jewry had almost been completed. This raid would, in future, be known as the "last round-up". There were still some Jews left in the city, but their number was negligible. Even Abraham Asscher, Professor Cohen and the remaining members of the Jewish Council were picked up that night. Of course, there were many thousands of Jews living in hiding all over the country, taken to their hideouts and supported by an, at this point smoothly-operating underground movement.

We were pushed into a truck which drove away when it was full to make room for a new, empty one. After a short ride we were unloaded at the Amstel Station and led to the platform next to the tracks. There we remained standing for hours, confused, without bathroom facilities and crying children everywhere. It finally took two trains, in succession, to move all the people. Abraham Asscher went in the first one, making me think of my mother's prediction that he would be deported before us - as we were put on the second train... Years later, after the war, both Asscher and Cohen were found guilty of collaboration by a Jewish Court of Honor. They did not serve a sentence, but were not allowed to ever again hold office in any Jewish institution.

During the next day we finally arrived in Westerbork, a transit camp in the northern part of Holland. This camp had been a Dutch innovation and was originally built for Jewish refugees from Germany and approved in 1939. In May, 1940, at the start





of the war there were about 750 German refugees. The camp itself occupied about 60 out of a total of 250 acres of bleak, desolate, wind-swept land; a flat, sandy area without very much growth of anything.

Again we stood in endless rows for processing, holding our backpacks, which seemed to grow heavier as time passed. There came a certain moment that all feeling left me and numbness set in. I remember someone coming around with large platters of peanut butter sandwiches which at least muted our hunger.

By now it was evening again and registration had been accomplished. My father and brother were taken to one barrack, my mother and I to another. We went up a few wooden steps and entered. What I expected I do not know, but the sight that greeted us was indescribable, even though I shall give it a try.

The barrack was very large; its wooden interior reaching a high, peaked roof. Here and there a naked lightbulb was hanging, illuminating what to me seemed like rags hanging all around. Upon further inspection I realized that these were in fact clothes, hanging on all sides from wooden tiered platforms, as well as from reachable rafters. The floors were wood, covered with sand and mud. We were assigned a bunk with a flat straw mattress at one side of the structure. It was a middle tier; there was one above and one below us. By this time we were too exhausted to say anything. My mother and I each took a blanket out of our backpacks and crept together into the narrow space. We had a few hours of fitful sleep, not used to the coughing, snoring, moaning and other night noises made by a few hundred women. Moreover, a terrible itching kept on waking us and we felt large welts forming on our bodies. In the morning our surroundings looked worse than the night before, if that was possible. We learned from barrack veterans that fleas had made themselves comfortable in our clean, woolen blankets and we gratefully accepted suggestions as to how to deal with the situation. We took our blankets to the washroom, in reality a euphemism for a dirty area with a long trough over which were horizontal water pipes with faucets here and there. When lifting our blankets to the light of a ceiling





bulb our eyes popped. The light-colored blankets had become polka-dotted with small, black specks burrowed within the material. As per instructions we went to work. One after the other we squashed the black insects with our thumb nails and removed the dead fleas. My blanket alone had been home to 59 fleas that morning.

The best word to describe Westerbork was "desolate", as previously mentioned. The camp was located in the middle of nowhere; sandy, windy, muddy. The barracks, made of wood, were terribly overcrowded; the washrooms and latrines filthy. Food was not very palatable, but no one had to starve. Moreover, we were lucky in that we received foodpackages from non-Jewish friends. My brother and I managed to adjust rather quickly but this seemed more difficult for my mother. She was totally unable to enter the stench and filth of the latrine with the result that she developed problems and had to visit a doctor. Eventually she, too, had to adjust.

The camp itself was run like a small town. At the head was the camp commandant who oversaw various sub-divisions such as a labor force, building bureau, messenger section. The administration division took care of the registration of inmates and particulars on each person, including lists of those deported or deceased.

Relations between Dutch and German Jews were strained in Westerbork and almost amounted to hostility. The Order Police consisted mainly out of German Jews who had been in the camp since its creation in 1939. They had assisted the German and Dutch police in the round-up of Jews in Amsterdam. They were also instrumental in the selection of Jews for deportation, which resulted in their remaining in Westerbork and earmarking Dutch Jews for transfer to the East.

Kurt Schlesinger was at the head of the Registration Department. He was a German refugee and reigned over a hierarchy of mostly



German Jewish underlings. He was all-powerful and had a Nazi mentality. He could put people on deportation lists or remove them from the rolls. He took good care of his friends and a pretty Jewish girl could postpone her deportation by granting him sexual favors. German Jews were seldom found among the deportees, which were mainly made up of Dutch Jews.

The barrack leaders were German Jews. Ours, Otto, was a pleasant man, trying to make the best out of a bad situation. Every morning he would walk around, asking if there was anyone needing the services of a doctor. He was the contact between the Jews in the barracks and the "higher-ups".

My father and mother both worked in Westerbork. My mother had managed to secure a job in the camp kitchen. She had to work hard and would return late at night with a pan filled with food - sometimes a thick soup, sometimes cereal.

Much later it became clear to me how my mom and dad reacted to conditions in completely opposite ways. My father, softhearted, only believing in the good of man and remaining Orthodox in his religion, was not able to cope with our plight. However, he remained unwavering in his beliefs. He never forgot his daily prayer and had arranged for a minyan to say Kaddish for his father who had recently died. My mother's approach, on the other hand, was totally different and much more down to earth. Right from the start of the persecution and in the camp she accepted reality and fought tooth and nails for the family. She had succeeded to keep Eddie out of German hands when he was fifteen. She was extremely practical and inventive and managed, by hook and by crook, to obtain jobs which would give her husband and children extra food or other privileges. She was prepared and willing to use her elbows and, if necessary, to push others aside in her endeavors.

As far as I was concerned, I adapted. During those war years I managed to conform better than at any time before or since. In a crazy way life in Westerbork was orderly for me. I attended classes daily in one of the barracks and studied different





subjects. There was a plethora of teachers which was essential because after a transport left, we required new ones to take the place of those who had been deported. We had school books. We put together little operettas, sang and danced at a cabaret evening every few weeks. The camp commandant and his entourage would come, watch the talent and clap benevolently.

To counteract the muddy condition of the soil we walked around in wooden shoes which was rather hard on the feet and not as colorful and cute as shown in travel folders. For us it was a dire necessity. Also, as entertainment in the camp, there was a fine orchestra made up of the members of the various philharmonic orchestras from the larger cities.

Had we been allowed to remain in Westerbork until war's end, we would all have survived. However, almost all Jews were deported. There were 93 transports in all and at the time of liberation the camp population consisted of 918 prisoners. Most of the German Jews were deported after the supply of Dutch Jews was exhausted. They formed a tight group in command, looking out mainly for each other.

In the German administration of the Netherlands and the Jewish Council, as well as the Order Police in Westerbork, there were few women in positions of any importance. One woman stands out because every prisoner in Westerbork knew her or had heard of her. Fräulein Slottke became a notorious, regular presence in the area. She was an old maid and looked the part. Actually she was charged with keeping records of the number of deportations. She seemed to have been much more influential than her job indicated and people fell all over themselves to get her ear and intervention in life-and-death decisions. To speak to her one might think her friendly and considerate but the opposite was true. She turned out to be an unfeeling monster who got her thrills and satisfaction out of her power to make people suffer. I do not have the slightest idea as to what happened to her at the end of the war but assume that she fell through the cracks with so many other war criminals.



There's no more shadow I can see.  
Only my thoughts I hear;  
The daylight slipped away from me  
And suddenly there's fear.

I'm sure it'll always stay this way  
My reaching out in air;  
No easing up, no carefree day,  
No one with whom to share.

Why so much night to stumble through,  
Praying relief will show;  
I'm tired, there's nothing else to do  
Where did the morning go.



Now for Westerbork's greatest horror. The weekly deportations. Since it was a transit camp, those in power had to compose a list every week with a quota adequate to fill a train which left punctually every Tuesday morning to eastern destinations. The aim and prayer of all prisoners was not to appear on the list at all cost which would guarantee a stay of at least another seven days. Behind the scenes much had gone on in the composition of the list. Names had been removed, others had been added in their place - favors had been granted; valuables had changed hands. On Monday there would be the train whistle, heralding the arrival of the empty train at the small station - on time every week.

On Monday night the barrack leader would read the list containing the names of those persons in that particular barrack who would have to get ready to leave the next morning. There would be total silence as the list was read alphabetically, last names first. It was like a death roll. The names of large families would be read, the parents first, followed by the names of all their children. Now and then uncontrolled sobbing could be heard. We listened on pins and needles, waiting until - according to alphabet - we had passed another crisis and breathed a guilty sigh of relief. The people who were destined to leave then set about packing their bags and those of their children. Once in a while the call had been for only part of a family which was even more heartbreaking.

During the 4½ months we spent in Westerbork we saw many transports leave; transports made up of orphans, of very old people, mentally ill persons; those caught in hiding and living in the penal barrack. One of the latter ones was my cousin Jopie. He had been in hiding but was caught one day walking in the street. I came upon him working in a separate section of the camp, wearing clothes on which there was a large S on the back, indicating "Straf"(penal). He, too, was deported and never came back.

On Tuesday morning those people indicated had to be ready for departure. In a long line they walked to the train, like





-4-

animals to the slaughterhouse. By 11 AM the doors were closed and the train would leave, a heartbreaking sight to behold. The next morning, Wednesday, it was life as usual and we were again plagued by small annoyances which would fade from memory come next Monday night.

In Westerbork my father received notification from the Red Cross that a visa had been granted to him and his family for entrance into Palestine. That piece of paper eventually sealed our fate. All those in Westerbork who had the same diamond industry stamp as my father were later transported to Theresienstadt and from there to Auschwitz. To my knowledge none returned. The visa gave me father the choice of being sent to Bergen Belsen instead, and this is what he elected for all of us and saved our lives, even though he perished. For clarification, Bergen Belsen had been spoken of as an exchange camp. Supposedly prisoners could be exchanged in that camp and sent to neutral countries.

As I knew it eventually would, our turn came. It was in the middle of February, 1944. A large segment of mainly Dutch Jews left, destined for Bergen Belsen. We rode through the night, trying to imagine what the camp would look like. Many stories had reached us in Holland. Supposedly each family would be given its own living quarters; food, though simple, would be adequate and there was, of course, the further hope that we might be exchanged from the camp and sent to Israel.

Reality caught up pretty quickly when we finally arrived at our destination, Celle, the closest railroad station to the camp which was situated on the Lüneburger Heide, a section surrounded by forests between the cities of Bremen, Hanover and Hamburg.

Our arrival was memorable. All alongside the train there were German soldiers, about 25 feet apart - rifles in hand - holding the leashes of large shepherd dogs. They screamed for us to get off the train and move faster. The word "schnell" was resounding from all sides. Nobody argued. We picked up our backpacks and started walking through the country. For miles we walked on countryroads. Now and then we would pass





## COMITE INTERNATIONAL DE LA CROIX-ROUGE

GENEVE (Suisse)

No. Page  
FD 3

## DEMANDEUR — ANFRAGESTELLER — ENQUIRER

Nom - Name JEWISH AGENCY

Prénom - Vorname - Christian name

Rue - Strasse - Street

Localité - Ortschaft - Locality JERUSALEM

Département - Provinz - County

Pays - Land - Country Palestine

## Message à transmettre — Mitteilung — Message

(25 mots au maximum, nouvelles de caractère strictement personnel et familial) — (nicht über 25 Worte, nur persönliche Familiennachrichten) — (not over 25 words, family news of strictly personal character).

Message of 10th.1.44: "please inform Samuel SALOMONS family, Netherlands Red Cross, that they have been registered on a Zionist list for immigration into Palestine and exchange. Their number is M/438/43/f/686; foreign office will communicate name to protecting power."

Date - Datum 25.1.1944.

## DESTINATAIRE — EMPFANGER — ADDRESSEE

Nom - Name JOODSCHE RAAD

Prénom - Vorname - Christian name

Rue - Strasse - Street Jan van Eijckstr. 15

Localité - Ortschaft - Locality AMSTERDAM

Province - Provinz - County

Pays - Land - Country Hollande

RÉPONSE AU VERSO

ANTWORT UMSEITIG

REPLY OVERLEAF

Prière d'écrire très lisiblement Bitte sehr deutlich schreiben Please write very clearly





I dreamt that I was home again;  
Don't ask me how or why;  
The land was flat, the rooster crowed,  
A windmill slowly drawing 'gainst the sky.

I saw my family and friends  
Crowd all around and touching me  
And telling me that they were whole,  
Their bodies mended, souls set free.

I dreamt my first love standing there;  
He smiled at me, could it be true;  
My heart was racing, sweet the pain,  
I called his name and then I knew.

Reality set in and soon  
My dream did slowly fade  
Into the inner depths of mind  
Where hopes are spun and wishes made.



a farm where, at the gate, staring at this strange procession were standing large, blond farmers' wives and little blond children - the girls with ribbons in braided hair.

After trodding for miles and miles we arrived at the camp. It was a veritable maze of barbed wire within barbed wire. The camp seemed to be divided into many different sections. Looking through the fence I saw large groups of prisoners in striped clothing. Later I would learn that they were Häftlingen, political prisoners. Watchtowers surrounded the camp at all sides. Inside the towers were soldiers carrying rifles. A strong, burny smell was noticeable and we saw smoke pour from a large, round, brick tower which we later got to know as the crematorium or "the pipe".

We were led into a small section of the camp which contained a few new-looking barracks. It would be home for the next couple of weeks as we were all quarantined. They allowed us to keep our own clothes; our hair was not shaved off and no number was tattooed on our arms as was the case in some of the other camps. That was the extent of the good features of Bergen Belsen.

During the quarantine, both my brother and I came down with chickenpox which hit us rather hard. In time we got over it and we were not as bad off as some of the prisoners who contracted scarlet fever and diphtheria during these first weeks.

It was February and extremely cold. The surroundings of the camp were beautiful, in contrast to our immediate enclosure. The landscape was white with snow, encircled by tremendous fir trees in the distance. Most of the time I was very cold. There was just a small stove in the barracks and moreover, due to my own negligence in not repacking my sweaters in my backpack, I had few warm clothes.

Our barrack leaders were a German Jewish couple. They had a daughter, Erika who was my age and we became friendly.



Besides keeping ourselves and the barracks clean there were jobs for all of us.

Clearly in my mind do I see small, wooden benches with a squarish hole in the center. They were handy to sit on or step on if you happened to sleep in the upper bunk. One day, the barrack leaders ordered me and other girls my age group to go outside and scrub each and every bench. It was well below freezing and there was snow on the ground. The water we used was icy and after a while I could no longer feel the brush in my hands. They had become frostbitten and so had my feet.

After spending a few weeks in quarantine we were transferred to the main camp, the Sternlager (Star Camp). This was actually the largest of 5 satellite camps comprising Bergen Belsen. It consisted of 18 barracks and contained Jews, mainly Dutch and ostensibly for exchange purposes. Many of these people held immigration permits destination Palestine. Males and females were housed in separate barracks. Families were able to meet.

From January 1944 to September 1944 eight transports arrived from Westerbork of 3,670 Jews, classified as exchange Jews. There were also 200 Jews from Tunisia, Tripoli and Benghazi; 200 Jewish women from France and several hundred Jews from Yugoslavia and Albania. The whole camp had been built to hold 10,000 prisoners but 60,000 were found upon liberation of which 15,000 died afterwards.

Even though there were no actual gas chambers in the camp, 37,000 people died from starvation, overwork, disease and cruelty. Corpses were burned, or bulldozed into mass graves. It became the first camp liberated by the Allies - the British - on April 15, 1945. The camp commandant, Joseph Kramer, also known as the "Beast of Belsen", was tried by the British and hanged.





Beginning March 1944, the camp was transformed into a regular concentration camp to which prisoners from other camps were transferred by the Germans. As far as exchange was concerned, only a few Jews were exchanged in July, 1944. 222 Jews with immigration certificates reached Haifa.

Block elders, German convicts, had free reign to vent their hatred on the prisoners. Then there were the Kapos, usually Polish inmates, appointed to head Commandos (work gangs) of prisoners. They collaborated with the Nazis. It was their job to break prisoners in mind and spirit and they were extremely brutal - and successful - in that endeavor. They had their own barracks, warm clothing and plenty to eat. Many of them were cohabiting with pretty Jewish girls which they had selected for that purpose.

There were no paved paths between barracks and most of the time we slushed through mud. My mother and I occupied the middle tier in the barrack assigned to us. We slept next to each other under a filthy camp blanket in a space so small that if one of us turned over during the night it could only be accomplished if the other one did the same.

Now let's remember the food; I'd rather forget. Thinking back I would have to say that food and hunger were the two words spoken more than any other. Slow starvation degrades man to the point where the sensation of hunger overtakes all other feelings and becomes obsessive in its intensity.

When there is slow and constant starvation of the body nothing else seems to matter. There is no more learning; thoughts of sex, or any physical activity for that matter, become non-existent. The base instinct takes over and almost everyone can be brought to the point of doing the most inhumane things if the reward promises to be a full stomach.



\*

Above the sodden desperate teeming  
Of people remnants slowly seeming  
To move and keep their life force going  
Where mold and lice and death are growing  
A bird is singing and a tree  
Is greening in a sky so clean and see  
The mountaintop so rich with snow  
The sun above, torment below.

How can the devil dwell in bird song;  
Why is the sun wasting its rays  
On hell, performing grotesque plays  
I'm mad, or else the world is wrong.

\*

Every morning a large caldron filled with what was supposed to be black coffee was brought to the barracks. We used this brown water mainly to wash ourselves because it was warm, not drinkable and we had access only to ice-cold water in filthy washrooms for cleansing purposes. The next meal of the day consisted of soup, again in caldrons, carried to the barracks by prisoners. The soup was made out of chunks of turnips in water. Once in a while, in its stead, there was some sloppy noodle concoction or spinach, whitish in color due to the presence of small, white maggots. We used to stand in long lines for our ladleful, holding our brown-colored camp bowls and fervently hoping to be one of the last to be served from a particular caldron. In that case the soup might be a little bit thicker on the bottom or, if one was lucky, there might even be some potato peel or, but very seldom, a small piece of meat in the bowl. Bread would be brought in the camp on trucks; heavy, dark German loaves. Every two or three days each prisoner would get 1/5th of a bread. In our barrack I was given the job by the women sleeping near me to divide the bread in 5 equal portions. I felt rather proud that they entrusted me with this very important task. I had a little piece of wood which indicated the measurements for the length of the bread down to centimeters and millimeters. Still it was not easy to give each person her share without being one millimeter off.





Once every few months we used to get one spoonful of white cheese or jelly. Of course, people charged with the distribution of these delicacies managed, as a rule, to keep a large amount for themselves. Under the circumstances we lived in no one could be blamed for obtaining food in any way possible.

There was this awful and constant hunger. I remember one man whose jaws were constantly going up and down as if he were chewing. Like most of us, he was a walking skeleton. One day the Germans caught him stealing some food. He was taken to the appel place and, in view of us all, beaten to within an inch of his life.

The severe hunger created a strange phenomenon, especially in the women's barracks. Mentally, every woman was constantly cooking. Recipes were exchanged; ingredients remembered. In the process of these discussions the hands and arms were totally involved; rounding out meatballs, chopping vegetables, kneading bread. You could almost smell the food. The small piece of bread we got had to last for a few days. We tried to eat a little slice each day and kept the remainder under our bodies at night. Sometimes, though, in the middle of the night someone would scream that her food had been stolen while she was sleeping.

Now and then my mother or I was able to get a hold of a raw beet or some potato peels. In order to cook these we had fabricated a small cooking implement which was no more than a can without the top and a square piece cut out at one side towards the bottom. I used to collect pieces of wood and cut them down to matchstick size. After lighting the little "oven" the fire would have to be constantly fed with the thin slivers of wood which were not easy to come by. Most of the kindling material came from the narrow shelves which made up the sleeping tiers and rested horizontally on small, vertical strips attached to the bunk frames at three levels. My mother and I in our middle tier and under our dirty, thin, straw mattress had just enough wooden slats left - put at a certain strategical distance from each other - to keep us from falling through. At one point the wood on our tier was exhausted so we both went to work. In the middle of the night we very carefully removed the slats above our heads, supporting the top tier.



On one such night we took one slat too many from our neighbors. We had left them only 4 or 5, each about 6 inches wide, upon which their mattress rested. Suddenly the two women fell through, right on top of us. We all weighed very little and it was no great accident.

To reiterate, food, not filth, degradation and cruelty became the focus of our existence, awake or asleep. One of the worst of my memories is the day I looked through the fence into the Häftlingen camp and saw two skeleton-like figures bent over a corpse lying on the ground. At that point I did not want to observe them any longer and I turned around when I saw them starting to cut the body open. Cannibalism was not an unusual occurrence.

\*

The ground is frozen, cracked with ice,  
The skies are cool and grey  
And shivering the human rows are standing  
Surrounded by the stately trees  
That rise in silent witness.

Appel it's called, the never-ending count  
Of bony forms, not moving and without a sound.  
The seconds become minutes, the hours a day,  
The skeletons they know no time but stay  
Upright as best they can and then again  
The count to five and ten and when it's done  
It's still not right.

Then, almost night, the guards are tired  
And fast the numbers tally.  
The painful mass of lice and bones  
Grotesque stumbling to its hole at last.  
Another day of death has passed.

\*





In the morning our alarm clock was the sudden cursing, screaming and banging noise of wood on wood. The kapos and female German guards would run through the barracks, hitting the tiers and bodies with their whips and sticks, creating an atmosphere of shock, fear, confusion and intimidation. It was time for appel; the counting of the prisoners. We'd grab whatever rags or clothing we could and ran out of the barracks as quickly as was possible while dodging the swaying weapons. Most of the time it was still dark as we lined up in rows of five on the large appel place. Then the count would begin. Nobody was exempt and I stood there numerous times shivering with a high fever. With a little luck the counting by the German guards would be over soon. Then the work: commandos would assemble, each with a guard and, hat in hand, they would pass the higher-ranking SS-men at the gate to go to the various places of labor assigned to each group. My mother and father worked for a while in "shoes", assembling pairs of shoes for German soldiers at the front from heaps of footwear. Then my mother got assigned to "piece goods", sewing and mending underwear for the soldiers. While working there she managed to sew together some underwear for me which she smuggled into the camp. There was a lot of sabotage going on in the labor buildings. Generally there was only one guard for many people and he used to be rather old. Instead of fixing the clothing, my mother and many of the other women would use a nail to make large tears in the material and then bundle the underwear as "wear-ready" for the troops at the front.

Sometimes, the appel count did not seem to tally. This happened mostly when the temperature was below zero and the ground knee-high with snow. We would stand for hours and hours on end, not caring any longer because our bodies had lost all feeling. More and more high-ranking SS-men would enter the picture, warmly dressed, snapping their small whips against their shining boots. They too, would go through the motions of counting and re-counting. Suddenly, after interminable hours, the total would be found correct and appel finished, for that day at least.





I did not yet have to work; I was 14 years old. My job was mainly to look out for the younger children in the barracks. Now and then an allied plane would fly over and strafe the barracks. I would take the smaller ones and we would creep under the bunks until the attack was over. There would be small holes in the roof and walls. I remember one such an attack, very sudden, while I was talking to an old woman. She was hit and collapsed dead on the ground. Never was I able to understand why the allied planes attacked the living quarters so often. They must have known that these were prisoners' barracks. ~~There were~~ much more effective targets around such as the work places or the officers' and guards' living quarters.

Also I tried as well as I could to take care of laundering some of our clothing in the washroom. That was a hopeless attempt. All I had to work with was cold water, but the lice and nits were all through the material, especially in the seams. Then, of course, drying the clothes was a problem, especially in cold and wet weather. There was a little coal stove in the middle of the barrack. I would try to get hold of a little piece of the stove pipe to wrap the ragged rags around. It would take hours of patience and elbow pushing to maintain my position and then I would give up and the final drying was accomplished by putting the wet clothes under our bodies and sleeping on them.

Conditions became much worse as time went by. Almost everyone suffered from dysentery, typhus and other diseases. The barracks were indescribably filthy. We all were covered with lice. The latrines were overflowing. People were dying all around us and naked bodies were lying in piles outside the barracks, stacked like firewood. People ~~sleeping~~ next to you on the tier would not move one morning and be put into the washroom on their way to the outside bodyheaps. Now and then a wooden cart would appear; a rope would be tied around the wrists of the corpses and the naked bodies would be thrown on the cart to be brought to the crematorium or one of the many mass graves around. We could always smell the crematorium going



at full speed and the saying was that you could get out of the camp only "through the pipe".

To my mind comes the picture of a very nice, grey-haired lady who slept a few tiers away from us. I realized that I had not seen her in a few days and thought her to be dead. Then, one morning I saw a female form just standing there. She looked like my old friend but strange at the same time. I suddenly noticed that her hair was now wild and brown of color and so were her very bushy eyebrows. When I observed her closer I realized that the lice and nits had taken over and completely covered her body, causing her hair to appear brown instead of gray. She died the next day. There are certain images that engrave themselves on your soul forever. The sight of this gentle, old woman became one of my recurring nightmares.

\*

I'd like to dry your tears, my friend;  
Your trip was long, you seem so spent;  
Forlorn in your own world you stand.  
Your fear, once far away, has overtaken you  
And made you child anew.  
To me you look so innocent;  
May I reach for your hand;  
I'd like to bring you life, my friend.

\*

Next to our camp, at the Häftlingen Lager, conditions were even worse than ours, if that was possible. Most of those people had been there longer than we and disease and starvation were rampant. There, also, large piles of skeletons ringed the barracks.

Each part of the camp had a particular guard, charged with overseeing that specific section. There were Heinz and Fritz; older SS-men; the first one thin and tall, the latter round-bellied with high-colored cheeks. They would accompany the work details to the shoe and clothing warehouses. The old, mustached, fat guard who oversaw cleaning of the latrine was known as the "shit king" who got his kicks out of sending prisoners down to the bottom of the latrine, waist-high in excrement, to fix clog-ups in the system. The bespectacled, slender SS-man who was





always counting and re-counting on the appel place was dubbed "William Tel\*." The amazing thing was that even in the face of death there was certain humor present and jokes sprang up in the most unusual places.

Another of the surprises which would hit us unexpectedly was the bed inspection. The bunks were supposed to be made up a certain way with the camp blanket stretched tight over the thin jute bag of straw which served as mattress. The corners had to be tugged in just so. Especially the woman guards enjoyed coming into the barracks with their whips which would come down on the bunks and put them in disarray. They would scream and hit the purported offenders with a vengeance.

One night, about 1 am. the kapos and guards roused the barrack, screaming that we all had to take a shower. My mother was convinced that we would not come back from that outing and insisted that I stay in the barrack. She made me lie down on the wooden shelf under the straw bag and straightened the camp blanket over all that. I was so thin at that time that, according to my mother, the outside of the bunk looked so flat that no one would be able to spot me. I remember lying there for hours, all, alone while the guards went through the barracks to make sure all the women were out. After unterminalable hours - during which I did not move an inch, the women returned and they had actually been taken to a shower house where they had stood under a trickle of water, 7 to a shower head. The Germans always managed to create upheaval and consternation at the weirdest times and the least expected moments. Razzias had taken place during Jewish holidays; sudden showers were deemed necessary on Yom Kippur; anything to keep the victims in a highly charged, and at the same time extremely submissive state.

Deterioration of our situation kept on an even par with the advancement of the Allied Forces. There were rumors about the invasion in the summer of 1944. The attempt to stay alive had

\* Tel is the Dutch word for "count"



become a 24-hour-a-day effort. For many, death seemed the only way out and the option of suicide became their solution. In this respect I remember one of my brother's friends who was in the camp with his mother. They both decided to end their lives. Through some quirk of fate the boy died and the mother recovered. She survived the war but has since lived in a hell of her own.

\*

My soul is crying silently, without tears  
But still my soul is crying.  
My face betrays no outward fears,  
But clearly I detect the weeping of my soul.

My heart is hurting but no infarct, no attack  
But still my heart is aching.  
No sign is shown, my features blank,  
Though my heart is hurting, real the pain.

"Why do you cry", I ask my soul;  
"My heart, why are you aching?"  
"What evil deeds, what ugly role  
"Did you perform to cause such pain?"

No weapon ever hurt so much  
No knife stab, not a gun  
My insides tender to all touch  
Because my soul is crying.

\*

As the days and weeks passed, the hunger increased in intensity. Disease was rampant and only through sheer willpower did we get up in the morning and managed to walk upright. It now had come to the point where we were not expecting any miracles and we all were reconciled to the fact that we would eventually die one way or another; it could have been a section of the prayerbook for Yom Kippur - some would die by fire, some by disease, some by hunger, some by thirst, some a little earlier, others a few days or weeks later. Resignation had set in. I had seen so many of





my friends die around me, and life among the corpses had become so everyday, that the fear of dying did not exist any longer. It almost became commonplace to wait for death, in whatever form it would overtake us. It seemed to me that I had always lived this way. Again, there was the difference between children my age and adults under these circumstances. I had been considered an "inferior" for 5 of my 14 years - about half my life of awareness. Older people, more realistic, saw the horrendous abomination for what it was - having had the experience of living as human beings for many years of their adult lives.

For a while my mother managed to get a job in the kitchen and she would steal some extra food for us, put it in a jar and tie the jar in the sleeve of her jacket. The kitchen detail was the one more closely checked than any other by the German guards. Upon re-entry into the camp at night an unexpected inspection would often take place. Each person in turn had to step forward to be scrutinized for the presence of contraband edibles. It was a close call for my mother a couple of times. She managed to stand in the center of the work group and before stepping forward to be inspected she would slide her jacket to the ground - a movement not noticeable by the guards. When her kitchen job came to an end, she created a new profession to obtain some extra food and became a "broker". The kapos in the camp had plenty to eat and sometimes wanted to give their sleep-in girlfriends a present. My mother talked to the women in the barracks and it seemed that each and every one of them had something they had held on to, but no longer valuable to them in its original form, such as a silk slip, a pair of silk stockings, a small piece of jewelry, etc. My mother would ask them how much bread they wanted for each item and then she would take the goods to the kapos and bargain for as much bread as she could get in exchange. The owner would get the requested amount of bread and my mother would keep the extra portion she had managed to extract from the kapos as her "broker's commission." Her sense of enterprise was amazing.

In early 1945 my father was not able to get up anymore. He was suffering from exhaustion and dysentery. My brother who then was 17 years old was in equally bad shape. I am trying to





forget my many trips to the latrine, carrying bowls full of watery excrement. My mother was working and I tried to help my brother and father during the day. I was no Florence Nightingale. I was a child who, herself exhausted, was unable to cope but had to. I remember with much hurt and regret the day that I shoved a receptacle under my father whose bowels were running constantly. I saw his emaciated body and suddenly I ran out of the barrack. I do not remember if I cursed God or prayed to God; only that I ran as far as my feet and the barbed wire allowed. Someone else must have helped my father off the bowl but it was an experience that will stay with me for the rest of my life. It was a moment in which the emotions of hopelessness, helplessness, anger, guilt, pity and fear combined into one intolerable feeling of anguish. Even though my father got sicker by the day, his religious beliefs were as strong as ever but the reality of what was happening around him must have defied his strong confidence in the basic good of mankind.

\*

Beneath my feet the solid ground lost sturdiness and swayed  
My careful balance quickly faltered, forcing me to stumble  
A shock reaction set in, long delayed,  
Threatening my fragile world to crumble.

I try to keep on standing without aim;  
Am desperately seeking for a handle  
The brighter light, once my purposeful flame  
Is now reduced to weakly flickering candle.

The world turned upside-down; I lost my grip  
Unable to hold on a second more;  
I know I may not fall or even trip  
Should force myself to function as before.

It's all so dreadful and so very strange  
I'm trying hard to keep the pieces fit;  
My life and world must straighten, not derange  
Though I am scared, not brave I must admit.



It was now February 1945. Rumors spread through the camp about the successful Normandy invasion and by the way the German guards behaved we deduced that their army was far from victorious. A little hope surfaced. I wanted our family to survive in the worst way. There was not much time left for my father and brother. Their health deteriorated daily.

A few times a week distribution of a few ounces of milk to mothers with babies took place in one of the barracks. Sometimes there was a little milk left and it would be given to whomever was nearest. Our skinny bodies were standing there, pressed together, each holding a cup and hoping to get some of the white liquid. A very few times I managed to obtain a little bit for my brother by pushing myself as far up front as possible. Taking my small stature into consideration and the frenzy of the hungry people around me pushing forward, I often thought I would choke right in the center of that shoving group of emaciated beings. There came a time that the pressure of all those bodies was too much for me. I would be overrun and thought I would suffocate. The Germans would get a perverse pleasure out of pushing back the weak mass and see people fall all over each other. Since then I have never been able to stand in the middle of crowds - whatever the occasion.

My father contracted pneumonia and was put in the hospital barrack. There was no medicine or equipment there, only a few women who had been nurses and tried to make the dying as comfortable as possible. I was still burdened with the thought of having to keep my father live, to keep him from dying. If only I could get him some food. One day I volunteered to work in the yard of the camp kitchen, cleaning carrots. As the guard was distracted, I put as many carrots as possible in my slacks which had elastic at the bottom. I managed to smuggle them back into the camp, grated them and gave them to my father, not realizing that raw carrots were not exactly beneficial for a person suffering from dysentery.

There was a strange custom in the camp. Every family which lost a close relative would get a chunk of white bread and sausage.





Our turn came on March 23, 1945. We were standing bent over my father's bunk. He was talking softly about all the things we would do when the war ended. He remained lucid until the very last, still optimistic and trying to leave us with a dream that would take us a little bit further and keep us alive a little bit longer. Then he just died. One of the nurses working in the hospital barrack had been one of his good friends in a Zionist youth organization. She closed his eyes and asked if we wanted my father's gold teeth since they would be taken out by the Germans otherwise. We rejected that offer and only took my father's wedding ring. I left the hospital barrack and did not cry.

\*

Remember when you played with me,  
High on your knee my world was good.  
The funny poems without rhyme  
The time you took to make me look  
At my small world which was secure  
And pure with you.

Remember when you took me to the fair,  
We saw the bear  
And it was getting late;  
And all the candy canes we ate.

Remember fishing trips we took,  
That hook I baited with some bread;  
Those happy afternoons we had,  
I'm glad we spent that time together.

Remember how you'd tuck me in,  
And kiss my chin and bless me;  
And rub my feet when they were cold.  
The nights I'd call you when my sleep  
Was interrupted by a dream  
And I would weep, and you'd be there.

Remember when they rang our bell;  
We knew so well who would be there  
To take us where.



We stayed together, yet apart and  
Thinking it would be the end  
I wanted to take care of you,  
Lighten your load but  
Knew not what to do.

Remember when you went through pain;  
Did not complain.

Remember too when death was near,  
You had no fear.  
I strained to hear you speak  
You were so weak,  
And talked about the coming days  
When we would all be home again,  
About the motorbike you'd ride  
And then I saw you slide away for good.

Remember how your nurse and friend  
Said Kaddish for you while she bent  
To close your eyes.

And even though no monument  
Will ever stand to honor you  
I know and care that you were there.  
I remember.

\*

So now it had come down to my mother, brother and myself. None of us could last much longer but my brother, especially, was in bad shape.



## ONLY IN DREAMS

Only in dreams do your features appear  
You come at night when dreams are thought real,  
The outside world becomes a stage of make-believe.

When all life is halted it seems just that we're  
Together again as it was long ago.  
There are many things that I wanted to know;  
Are you happy wherever it is you may be,  
Can you hear me or touch me or even just see  
How I've missed you and longed for you here all these years;  
Do you know I grew old and of the many tears  
I have silently shed searching crowds for your face,  
Once so dear, full of loving, familiar and bright;

But I only can find you in darkness at night  
And when sunlight reigns, comes the stark morning light  
I no longer can see you and can only keep  
Your memory alive until night's blessed sleep.





All through the time we spent in the camp we never heard or received anything from the Dutch Red Cross. There had been times when suddenly the German guards would be very busy. New camp blankets would be given out; the latrine would be cleaned. We knew that this was the sign that a visit from the International Red Cross was imminent. The camp commandant would strut around, drawing attention to the clean surroundings; the good air; following him would be a few, long-faced, dark-suited, drab-looking individuals who seemed to agree with everything he told them. Then, after they left, the blankets went back, the corpses piled up and things were the way they had been. It was amazing how people could be fooled so easily. During the last few weeks it was the Swedish Red Cross which came to our help; late as it was. We started to receive packages containing Swedish crackers, pea soup powder and a chunk of bacon.

After my father's death, my mother, brother and I tried to be together as much as possible. It was the end of March and the sun had become more visible and gained more strength. We used to walk outside a little bit with my brother between us so that he had to get up, as difficult as that was for him. At that point there were only a few of my friends alive; the mountain of corpses grew daily. Disease was rampant, especially typhus. Whatever organization there had been in the camp seemed to have disintegrated. We knew that something was about to happen but had been unable to hold on to the dream that began "after the war is over." My mother was still bargaining with some higher power. She would promise that she would be happy living in a small attic room with just enough to eat if the war would only end. Furthermore, she bartered for that privilege for the rest of her life and promised to never be dissatisfied again. Maybe I had a dream too but it never surfaced and I tried to go on day by day.

In the beginning of April 1945 we learned that a train would be leaving from the Celle station with about 2,500 prisoners. We had nothing to lose anymore and decided to try and get on. At the station pandemonium reigned; yelling guards and many half-dead



camp inmates. The train was made up of cattle cars and some passenger cars. We sat on the platform. Suddenly I saw a pile of white beets about 100 yards to the side. I made a run for it and got to my target, grabbed what I could and again put them in my one pair of elastic-bottom slacks. One of the German guards saw me. He raised his rifle and started shooting but missed, due to the fact that he was drunk and his target was very skinny and small. We were not yet able to board the train and with some wood we found we cooked the beets, as well as 2 pilfered potatoes on top of our little oven.

April 6, time to get into the train and leave, and hope. We were pushed forward and landed in one of the passenger cars, trying to get a seat on a bench before all space had been taken. My mother and brother managed to sit down on a small bench. Across from them were three sisters, huddled together; the oldest no more than 17. They looked lost, exhausted and beyond hunger. Rags hung around their bodies.

There was no space for me. - Even the floor area was now occupied. I did the only thing left open to me under the circumstances and climbed onto the two-slatted wooden luggage rack. I was able to sit down on the rack if I bent over, because it was very close to the roof of the train. The most comfortable way to stay on my perch was by lying down with my knees bent; so that is how I stayed.

Most of those on the train were sick; many were dying. Dysentery, typhus and typhoid were all around us.

One day followed the next. The guards were still with us on the last car; well-fed and drunk most of the time. At night, as we looked out of the window we could see deserted railroad stations and towns dressed in darkness. We rode mainly at night.

In the middle of the week our train was attacked and strafed by Allied planes. I remember that a higher-ranking German, probably





wounded, because he was leaning on a cane, told us to get out of the train. There was a narrow but long gully at the side. He directed us how to lie against one side as the planes came and strafed from one direction and to lie against the opposite sloping side after the planes turned around and renewed their strafing attack. The Allies thought they had found a train with German troops and did not realize they were shooting at prisoners. This episode had almost slipped my mind but, as I write, I can see it clearly and feel that I should put it on paper to give due to the one decent German soldier I met during five, long years.

Finally, after 5 days the train stopped. The land to our right was flat and green. On our left the terrain sloped down and the soil gave way to a lake at the bottom of the hill.

It was slowly getting darker and colder.

\*

There is a lovely tree I know  
It carries leaflets on its bough  
In fact, it's all intact.  
It's struggling for survival though,  
Because it has no roots and so  
Is working twice as hard to grow.

\*



-101-

LATER

By 1949 I graduated at the top of my class. I did not have the slightest idea where to go from there. Always, in the back of my mind had been the thought of maybe becoming a doctor, or possibly a nurse. It would not have been difficult for me to enter the university at Amsterdam but I did not. At that time there were not many female doctors, first of all. Furthermore, we did not have guidance counselors in school who helped us with the selection of a particular career. That was left to the parents and the circumstances at home. As indicated, my mother had remarried; her new husband did not treat me well - he did not like me and the feeling was mutual - and there was no one close to me who could give me encouragement to continue my studies. Then, also, most of the new friends I had made wanted to start earning money and managed to get jobs, in the secretarial field mainly.

The majority of my new friends were survivors, having been in a camp or hidden; many of them without parent, they were living with some relative who had managed to make it or, in some cases they were living alone in a furnished room. We stuck close and arranged to spend most of our free time together, the boys, as well as the girls. Some kind of social life flourished. Physically I had some problems. At one point I was diagnosed as having anemia. Then a period started where giant hives plagued me day after day. I would wake up with an eyelid so blown up that I could not open my eye, or my lips would be swollen and most of the time there were large welts on my body. No doctor could find the cause of the problem. Scratch tests were done in a hospital but did not point to any particular origin for the unpleasant symptoms. Our good, old family doctor helped me get rid of the hives. Every day at lunch time I would go to his office and he would give me a calcium injection. That did the trick. With my present knowledge I am convinced that the welts had a psychological origin. Living in the same house with my stepfather was a constant pressure on my nervous system which was not too strong to start with.



I wound up doing what would give me the least resistance. At a secretarial school I took shorthand in three languages as well as typing. After passing those tests I obtained a diploma for having mastered good command of English business language, spoken and written. In the middle of working for this same type of certification in the French language we obtained our visa for the U.S.

To go back a little, while mainly working at night on the additional certification I had obtained a job as a secretary with a very pleasant employer in a beautiful office on one of the canals. We got along fine and I remember him being a champion bridge player in Holland. Also during this period I was "courted" by a few boyfriends. My social and sexual experience had not yet caught up to where it should be and when it came to serious proposals I would get scared and withdraw. The amazing part was that I did think I actually fell in love at that time, and that the person in question not only treated me like dirt, but proved to be homosexual as I learned later. I really was not too stable emotionally.

In the years after the war there was again fear in Holland. People were talking about a possible invasion by Russia and the foreign consulates were swarmed with requests for visas. Large amounts of money were given to persons who were peddling Mexican visas and would disappear after receiving the cash. My brother had met an American diamond dealer who was visiting Amsterdam and took a liking to Eddie. He arranged for my brother to come to America and within a few months Eddie left. We all applied for an American visa which we received about a year later. It was early 1951. I had to quit my job; say goodbye to the small world of friends I had managed to build up around my person and at the beginning of February, 1951, my mother, stepfather and I left for the United States on the "Veendam". Some of my friends went to the pier in Rotterdam with us to say goodbye. One of them was a young man I had been dating for a while and who might have become my husband had we stayed in Holland. I was too close to my mother, though, to remain behind and again had to disrupt my small friend support system





created so carefully, to start over in a new land.

It took the "Veendam" two full weeks to reach Hoboken where we were picked up by a brother of my stepfather and his wife, who had given the guarantee in money to the consulate to promise that we would not wind up on welfare. They took us to New York and, although I was happy to be reunited with my brother, in my eyes the city was as ugly as could be. I still remember that a small hotel apartment had been rented for us at Hotel Lucerne, 110 West 79th Street near Broadway. (How strange that names and addresses of long ago stick with a person.) The buildings looked extremely unappealing and unclean. The fire escapes, to me, were an eyesore - a feature unknown in Holland but then they only had one skyscraper in Amsterdam and that was 12 floors high. Neither had I ever seen bread, sliced, in packages. We had been used to buying crisp, seeded rolls in the bakery or just-baked breads, white, whole wheat or seeded which would be cut at home into slices about 1½ inches thick, not the skinny, soft and sticky white bread that I got in New York.

\*

Who am I and why did my path  
Lead me to this place which has  
No memories for me, no past  
On which to build what lies ahead.

Where am I that I search in vain  
For things I dream of.

Am I sane or real  
Or am I floating in the air

Is there an I?

\*

My new life had begun. Again I had to make a start and I felt like a robot, doing all the necessary things but not enjoying any of it. After we obtained a new apartment in Queens, I started working for a Dutch firm in Wall Street - a job I liked. Now and then the "big boss" would come in from The Hague and on one such occasion he asked for me to come to the Biltmore Hotel - it was the 17th floor - to



take Dutch dictation. He had more than dictation in mind, though, and I found myself in a situation I had a lot of trouble getting out of, mainly because of my inexperience. Somehow I must have given the correct "no" signal because I left in one piece by elevator, even though at one point I had considered the window but given up on that idea because of the height.

At this time my brother was also living with us. He had obtained a position with a different employer, in the diamond industry. His old boss had committed suicide. He and a friend and a girlfriend and I would now and then go to a hotel in the mountains for a weekend in a second-hand car he had bought. I remember 5 flat tires on one such trip.

In the summer of 1951 I went by myself to the country for a week. There was a large single crowd and at night, during the entertainment, a young man started to talk to me. He was there for the weekend only and asked for my telephone number. Upon my return to the city he called and we started dating. By the end of March 1952 we were engaged and we got married in September 1952. As of this date, Nat and I have been together for 40 years, rather unusual in this day and age.

My work with the Dutch firm continued and I was now the executive secretary of the vice-president. We got along famously. I was acquainted with all the accounts he handled and when he had to travel for the firm I used to take over as best I could. Whenever he was away he had a tape recorder with him and would send me tapes, telling me to do this ..., or not to forget that ... At one point he had to journey to Sao Paulo, Brazil, a trip he did not look forward to but he went through with it anyway. During the return flight the plane went down in the Brazilian jungle and all passengers perished. Business had to go on as usual and I took over where he had left off, promoting my status to the level of junior executive. I stayed with the company until my 7th month of pregnancy and then gave up the hassle of the subway every day. In a heatwave, on July 1, 1955, Sharon was born in Horace Harding Hospital, in Queens, where we had rented a small apartment, not far from my mother.





I was excited over having given birth to such a beautiful baby; and gorgeous she was. Even the nurses in the hospital admired her and the curl on top of her head she was born with.

My worries increased after her birth. Self-confidence had never been one of my strongest traits and I was constantly afraid that the care I provided was not adequate. When Sharon was asleep I used to stand with my ear against her door, afraid that I would not hear her cry. I was nursing her and worried that she did not get enough nourishment, even though the doctor reassured me that she was doing fine. When my brother developed a sudden paralysis of one side of his body the anxiety dried up my milk supply after only 6 weeks of nursing. Eddie was later diagnosed as having had an unusual virus which had attacked his nervous system. He totally recovered.

\*

Do not despair - within each  
Lies a seed for happiness  
Which should be nurtured.  
I confess that I feel doom  
Instead of happiness in bloom  
Maybe it's because I feed  
My hurt and I neglect the seed.

\*

At no time after the war had I been an outgoing, jolly, optimistic person. As a matter of fact, I was often plagued by depression which, at that time, was not actually diagnosed as such. Consequently, my daughter was stuck with a mother who adored her but who was too serious and depressed and too worried about taking care of her the right way. Nevertheless she grew up to be an adorable, precocious toddler with a smile for the world, idolized by her parents, grandparents and other relatives. When Ronnie came into the world on May 12, 1958, she treated him as one of her dolls.

Taking care of Ronnie came a little easier, except that after



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his birth, while at home, I suddenly hemorrhaged and had to be rushed to the hospital by ambulance. My mother took care of both children during my stay and I survived, thanks to blood transfusions. However, by this time my nervous system was shot and I was extremely depressed for many weeks. As unable as I was to do anything else in the condition I found myself, I always managed to take good care of the children. At times this seemed almost impossible to do but my basic nature was so conscientious that it overrode my bleak mood.

My brother had gotten married in the meantime. Like our wedding, theirs was a small affair in the Rabbi's study with lunch afterwards. We just had no extended family to invite. His marriage broke up after about 10 years and 2 children. He since remarried and recently celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary.

What never stopped to amaze me was the way my mother and brother had reshaped their lives after the war. They seemed to enjoy their existence and tried to cram as much living as possible into their days. My mother went on vacations with my stepfather and played bridge a lot. Eddie, who by this time had his own business, had always had his heart set on learning how to fly. He bought a small airplane and, at the age of 48 became one of the oldest persons to obtain a pilot's license.

In Novemer 1958 we moved into a house we had bought on Long Island - the biggest purchase we would ever make. The children started school - first Sharon and then, a few years later, with a little more trepidation, Ronnie started kindergarten. Nat, my husband, was working in Manhattan in the printing business and he had to take the Long Island Railroad to work every day. It was not easy, those first years, but we managed.

I made some good friends, the type of relationships which last forever. After 30 years we are still close with these couples as well as with our good neighbors and we are in regular touch; even though we now live in California.



Our social life was limited when the children were small. Under no circumstances did we want a babysitter and for special occasions, or a movie now and then, my mother would come from Queens and stay with them. I remember one night when we decided to hire a well-recommended older woman to stay at the house for a few hours while we went out to dinner. We said goodbye and drove off. Then Nat and I looked at each other. We turned around, drove around the block and parked in the driveway for about half an hour, listening for any crying sounds in the house. All was quiet but still we went inside, paid the babysitter and never again had anyone but a relative or close friend take care of the children.

We joined the Conservative Synagogue but our visits were mainly limited to the High Holy Days and the three-times-a-week car pool taking Ronnie to Hebrew School and eventual preparation for his Bar Mitzvah. I never became involved in any of the synagogue's activities or in the Sisterhood. In my defense I have to say that there was no warm atmosphere in that particular Jewish community; no reaching out to new members. One tight clique ran the synagogue and all its activities and it would have taken a concerted effort on our part to push ourselves in. The enterprising spirit to do so was one I did not possess. Generally I was rather withdrawn and shy meeting people; I had difficulty making friends and was not the type to reach out. For me to respond, people had to reach out to me and practically pull me out of my corner. Since Nat was not the pushy type either, our social life was not exactly flourishing.

Our children performed well in school. Sharon was a very dedicated and conscientious student. She remained at the top of her class at all times and would not settle for less. Ronnie's occupation with schoolwork was less intense but he nevertheless managed to be one of the best students in every class, despite his involvement with Little League and his friends. My role in happenings at school was far too excessive, as I look at it now. Every day when Sharon came off the school bus I questioned her about the day; the tests she





had taken; the grades received and her homework. I helped prepare reports, put myself to work on the new math and ran back and forth to the library to obtain information not available at home. It was as if I was vicariously living my children's school days. No doubt Sharon's social life suffered by my actions, although I did not think so at the time. She was very serious, did a lot of work and was only satisfied if she retained the status of the number one student in her class. Moreover, my constant worry was not very conducive to her making friends. My fear was overpowering at times. Having my children near me - within reach - put my mind at ease. I should have been more flexible and given especially Sharon free reign to get involved with her friends. When my children were not at home I imagined all the horrible things that could possibly happen to them. Ronnie's nature did not accept my excessive interfering in his life and he managed to create good relationships within a circle of friends.

The constant thread running through my life at that time was that I was different from most people. I felt the obligation to do everything for all those around me. When I went to the store to do food shopping I never bought what I liked, I did not even consider it. Shopping for clothes followed the same trend. I shopped for the children, looked for Nat in the men's department and often found something for my mother. Most of the time I did not bother choosing something for myself. When one of my friends drew my attention to my actions it dawned on me that I was living like the proverbial martyr.

\*

I cut myself so you won't bleed  
Your sins my back will hold  
My guilt and misery I feed  
Until one day I'll fold.

Your peace of mind is my concern  
And for that goal I'll suffer  
Sometimes I don't know where to turn  
To make myself a buffer.



What will you do when I'm not here  
To make your burdens lighter  
You then may think it is not fair  
That you'll be your own fighter.

Now, after all of you are well  
I wind up a disaster  
There's nothing left of me but shell  
So you can crunch me faster.

Believe me now, I've had enough  
Of all your problems borne  
No, all this suffering is not bluff  
I really am too worn.

Maybe my life's important too  
And something I must weigh  
Was I not made to serve just you  
Then better I not stay.

Don't worry though, don't take it hard  
My powers will not cease  
I'll gladly tear myself apart  
And give you each a piece.

\*

Only at home did I feel some sense of security even though there seemed to be no enjoyment in anything I undertook or experienced. I managed to go through the motions but could not wait to get home during every outing or vacation. There was a total inability to make decisions and every small choice became a major project. It became incapacitating to the point that I left the decision-making to others. My mother played a large role in my life and was very strong mentally. Her second husband had died in the sixties and from then on she spent almost every yearly vacation with us. Usually this would amount to a week or two in a hotel in the Catskill Mountains in Upstate New York. It was there that I experienced my first panic attack, except at that time I did not recognize the feeling nor the word to describe it.





It was the 4th of July, about 1964. Nat, the children and I had spent almost one week at a small hotel in the mountains. In day camp, Sharon and Ronnie had worked hard, because they were to appear in a small parade of all the children, carrying flags and reciting certain patriotic phrases. The question came up whether I should stay another week in the mountains with the children, in which case my mother would be with us, while Nat would return to the city, as he had to be back at work. On the one hand I knew that the additional week would be of benefit to the children, who had a great time. This "big" decision tormented me hour after hour. There was the feeling of guilt if I would go home, of denying the children an extra week's fun to benefit my fears. I was desperately anxious to go home again and found it impossible to stay another week. As so many times before, I knew that whichever decision I took would be the one I'd regret later. I was very well aware of this looking-back phenomenon. It came into play with every choice I had to make; every decision or selection.

A tennis match was being played by two of the guests and I was watching. My mind, at this point, was hurting from thinking - if there is such a thing as a painful mind. I started turning to go back to the room when I suddenly seemed unable to move. My breath came out in short gasps as I was trying to get air to my lungs. My heart was beating a mile a minute and I started losing feeling in my arms and legs when a numbing, tingling sensation took over in my fingers and toes. My eyes had trouble focusing and I did not think I could remain standing. Somehow, my embarrassment in front of other people was so great that I forced myself to walk back, convinced that I would drop dead any minute. At the same time I met Sharon coming back from day camp, all excited about the coming festivities. Trying to act as normal as possible I told her that I had a headache and asked that she get her father from the baseball diamond to come to the room. Within a few minutes he was with me and I must have been so convincing that he was positive I was having a heart attack. He asked the desk to immediately send for a doctor and in no time a female physician arrived. She checked my heart, blood pressure and all vital signs and reassured me that I was not dying but was experiencing some sort of emotional upheaval. She handed me a



prescription and left. Right away I felt better knowing that I would not put Nat and the children through the predicament of having to cope with a corpse in the Catskills. The pills did relax me. It was the beginning of many years of relying on valium. It was always close at hand; if I could not sleep; if a decision had to be made; after a fight; before a fight. In the beginning it was helpful; after a certain period its value diminished.

Various doctors, well-intended, tried to treat me, my symptoms and a combination of both. No new tranquilizer entered the market place or it was tried on my person. I landed in emergency rooms time and again as I was very sensitive to chemicals and managed to get hit with every adverse reaction. Somehow my body was rejecting all pharmaceutical aids; from penicillin to codein to various antibiotics and tranquilizers.

In the sixties I was in a worse mess than at any time after the war. The effect on my marriage was not exactly beneficial. I felt that Nat did not understand what I was going through and I, as a matter of fact, did not grasp it either. Through it all the children behaved wonderfully and Sharon, more at home and older, was very helpful and supportive knowing that "mommy did not feel well." My mother stayed with us for a few weeks and took over, making me feel all the more child-like as all decisions were being made for me.

\*

Don't cry for me when I am gone  
Please don't deny my peace of mind, my peace of heart  
Which I do hope to find apart  
Of all that's called our life on earth.

Don't cry for me, don't even care  
Because I really was not there.  
I tried to be a person but just air became  
Not knowing how to shape or fit.  
I tried to do my best to earn respect or even love,  
But now I have no more to give  
And my despair tears everybody down.  
That's not my wish.





If you can cope and hope for better things  
Your right should not be spoiled.  
My plight is mine, and mine alone.  
I'm slowly dying and the pain is eating at my being.  
Perhaps I really never was or should have been;  
So look at it that way and please don't cry for me.

\*

This became the time that I started writing poetry in earnest. It helped. There were days I wished I were dead because going on seemed impossible. Putting my feelings on paper acted as some kind of catharsis, letting steam out of the pressure cooker. As time went by, sentences would enter my mind and pen and paper were always close.

Even though I hope that I was a good mother during those difficult times I doubt that I gave the children what was important during that stage of their being; the joy of living. My love for them was overwhelming; probably the main reason for my going on, but I lacked the strength to laugh with them, to be lighthearted and, to be the kind of all-around mother deemed essential by the then ubiquitous mouthings of Dr. Spock. When they were upset about the slightest thing I took it to heart to extreme. Whether a teacher or playmate would hurt them or disappoint them, my rage would be out of proportion and I would fight their battles with all the strength I could muster. Of course, this was a great mistake but I did not recognize it as such at the time. I felt that there was so little near and dear to me that I loved so much, that I had to protect them at all cost. Their pain became my battle; their triumphs my reason for being.

When I finally started my part-time job with the French publishing firm it helped to have my thoughts concentrated on my work a few hours a day but the fear of a panic attack suddenly striking remained with me. By this time I had read articles describing my symptoms and knew that the manifestations of these attacks did not portend death. Still, I had developed an aversion to driving alone on the parkways. Panic attacks had struck there a few times and it was a terrifying experience.





After about 4 years , my firm prepared to move to Manhattan on Fifth Avenue. There was no way I would join them. It was impossible for me to go on the Long Island Railroad into Manhattan every day, especially the way I felt. Then, also, I would be too far away from the children, should I be needed. My employer reacted in a way I could not have dreamed. He insisted that I do my work at home and just come into the city one day a week to deliver whatever I had gotten ready - and pick up my check. They brought my filing cabinets, records, electric typewriter, desk and chair to the house and every day I took some time to busy myself finishing the work I had brought back from the city. It was a wonderful set-up and lasted until 1974 when the magazine department was dropped by the firm, heralding the end of my services with them.

In the late sixties Sharon started high school and Ronnie was entering junior high. The village where we lived had been one of the first to integrate on Long Island. To that purpose they had closed a school in the colored section of town and the busing process was in full swing bringing elementary and high school children to schools which had previously been mainly white, and busing all kindergarten children to one school in the black area. A lot of time and money was wasted on this procedure, money which could have been spent on better teachers and expanded programs in all schools. Talking about better teachers brings to mind a science teacher Ronnie had as a substitute in junior high school. Ronnie used to mention that this particular educator had a lot of trouble answering questions, and time in class was mainly spent reading the next chapter in the book. A few months went by and then the detectives entered the school and took the teacher away. It seemed that he was no teacher at all but an escapee from jail who had gotten hold of a relative's teaching certificate. It was just another happening in an unruly period of many changes. At Sharon's high school there was a lot of fighting going on and many a night did the Long Island newspaper feature on its front page a photograph of the State Police in full riot gear at the entrance of her school.



In high school Sharon became a member of the Mathletes, a group of students excelling in mathematical skills. The teams would have meets at different schools and our school performed outstandingly in these matches. In 1971 it was arranged that our Mathletes would travel to Europe - particularly Amsterdam and Copenhagen - to meet similar students on the Continent. Besides the two teachers, one additional chaperone was required and in a mad moment I volunteered. Where it had been extremely difficult for me to leave the house and go on vacation with the family, traveling on my own, without my husband and son would prove to be a total impossibility. My agony before the trip was excessive. I had never flown before but that was not the cause of my distress. Leaving the house, especially at night had, up to that point, been very hard and going away with myself in charge, completely inconceivable. For weeks I lived in a panic. On the one hand I felt that I just could not manage to go. At the same time, not wanting to renege on a promise, I constantly worried that I would get sick and not be able to travel. Fear overwhelmed me when I realized that I had left no avenue open for escape. To insure a healthy state of body at time of departure I started swallowing antibiotics well in advance. The effect proved to be disastrous. The day we left, my apprehensions peaked and I had to actually be talked onto the plane by telephone with the help of a psychologist-friend. The moment the plane took off the panic fell away. However, the ingesting of so many antibiotics took its toll. I developed severe diarrhea and spent most of the two days in Amsterdam, as well as the three days in Copenhagen in bed, under the care of a Danish doctor. As usual, I had not allowed myself the sensation of enjoyment. A good time was had by the rest of the group, including my daughter.

After this travel fiasco I took the easy way out and decided not to step out on my own from then on if it involved staying away from the house overnight.





In 1972 Sharon graduated high school after three years. She was first in her class with an 97.13 average. Besides being given many honors from various organizations, numerous universities offered her partial scholarships while Hofstra University on Long Island made a full Phi Beta Kappa scholarship available to her. After accepting that award she enrolled as a pre-med student, with a major in chemistry. She continued living at home, the university being only about 8 miles away. That same year Ronnie entered high school and continued to be an excellent student despite his busy social life.

My big wish during those years was to go on a trip to Israel. Every year I would send away for all kinds of brochures and plan our trip in detail. However, when it came to the point of actually making reservations I'd change my mind and stayed home. My brother used to tease me by telling people that I traveled "by brochure." It was rather embarrassing for me, especially since it was almost impossible to explain having this problem to someone who had never experienced it. What also bothered me a lot was a very uncomfortable feeling which would come over me every day at dusk. Once it was dark I was fine, but the transition from light to dark made me feel extremely uneasy. Trying to figure out the reason for this particular mood I could only come up with the thought that at that time of day, in war time, the Jews had to be home and it had been after twilight fell that most raids were executed and it was those hours we used to listen for soldiers' footsteps and banging on the door. In later years, after moving to California, I met a gentleman and his wife in Palm Springs. He also came from Holland and had lived rather close to me in Amsterdam, although I did not know him there. He, too, had spent time in Bergen Belsen. While talking he confided to me that dusk was the worst part of the day for him. He would feel very agitated and want to leave the house. It was strange that we both had this same uneasiness. I had been writing a lot of poetry by then and, maybe to help him, as well as myself, the poem "Twilight" came into being but in the poem I described dusk as a wonderful changeover from light to dark.



\*

Come twilight, softly spread your wings  
Over the sundrenched clarity  
Of mountains, dale, of rushing springs,  
Shadow the land, the waves and me.

Herald the dark, close off the day,  
Put thoughts of slumber in my mind;  
Help me chase threatening cares away,  
That I in darkness peace may find.

Blanket the sharpness of my sight,  
Soften its brightness steep;  
Prepare me for the fall of night,  
So restful I may sleep.

When morning sun lightens the sky,  
Color and shapes appear,  
My mind will be refreshed and I  
Have lost my worries, quelled my fear.

\*

When, in 1974 my job with the French publishers came to an end, I began working, on a part-time basis, with a direct mail order counselor who was semi-retired and had recently sold his business of many years. At the time we met, he was accepting free-lance assignments out of his house for various large companies. Our relationship was excellent and I thoroughly enjoyed the idea of using words as a vehicle to promote and sell. The clients became many and varied to the point where we had to expand, sharing a large office with a firm active in list brokerage. The clients ranged from a publisher of a financial newsletter, whose list of subscribers increased from a negligible amount to 25,000 - to the full promotion of gold and silver coins for the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. At no time did I enjoy work more, and it was during this period that I came to realize that my strength lay in the usage of words and I believe it was this trait which contributed to our excellent cooperation and my being "good at the job." Thirteen years later my employer sold his house and retired to New Hampshire.





After three years Sharon graduated Hofstra University Summa Cum Laude with a 4.0 average and a major in chemistry. In 1975 she entered Albert Einstein College of Medicine in the Bronx. She shared an apartment in Einstein's housing complex with two other girls. It was the beginning of her leaving home but I slowly got used to it, especially since she returned home almost every weekend with a load of dirty laundry. A few times, in doing her laundry, I made the acquaintance of a cockroach or two. The Bronx housing complex was loaded with them. To keep our house roach-less I would take her bag out in the yard and shake each and every piece of clothing before bringing it in. Sharon often brought friends along for the night which would mean an additional load of someone's dirty clothes. I don't think any of the medical students ever considered making use of their basement's laundry facilities.

Ronnie entered Hofstra University in 1976 but decided rather quickly that, while living at home might have satisfied his sister, it was not for him. He applied to S.U.N.Y. in Binghamton and spent his sophomore year in Upstate New York in the Liberal Arts program; the last two year in the School of Business Management of the same university. He graduated in 1980 with a B.S. in Business Management.

With Sharon in medical school and Ronnie away in Binghamton it was the first time that both children were out of the house and I realized that they would come back to stay now and then, but it would never be as before. The children had always kept me busy, one way or another, and I suddenly had to face myself and find new ways to get involved in doing things for Nat and me. It was as if starting all over again - similar to the time before the children were born, except that now we were twenty-five years older. Both bedrooms were unoccupied, and the so-called empty-nest syndrome hit me full force.

This was a period that I started to feel rather sorry for myself but a lot of writing at my job and poetry at home cured me after a short while.





\*

Life's lesson learned in being here  
Has made it clear to me  
That in this whole, wide, empty world  
We're lonely as can be.  
No part of parent, spouse or child,  
No brother, sister, friend  
Belongs to us and therefore will  
Be with us til the end.  
It's **you** who has to care for **you**  
You can count on no other  
And should you hurt a bit too much  
You're looked on as a bother.  
We're born alone, we die that way  
And in between we try  
Not counting on a single soul  
To make it and get by.  
This is how life is meant to be  
Your struggles are your own;  
And only then will you be free  
When knowing you're alone.

\*

When Ronnie left for college, he entrusted me with the total care of Jinxie, a dog who had followed him home four years earlier and never left. Jinx was mainly Alaskan malamute, a breed of dog raised in Alaska as sled dog. Although she looked like a wolf and had a powerful body, she was the sweetest, most gentle pet to have around the house. Ronnie would have made a great vet. He loved animals and through the years presented me with various kittens, two ducks, a rabbit with a broken leg and every stray dog in the area. Here at least I had another soul to worry about. There was no flexibility in my schedule for the dog - which was a trait I lacked in general. After work I used to race home to leave Jinx out and feed her, though I doubt very much if she would have realized it if I had prepared her dinner one half hour later. Jinx developed diabetes and went slowly blind. For two years I ran after her in the yard with a glucose dipstick, trying to catch some of her urine when I saw her squat. Conscientiously I calculated the amount of insulin required each



day and gave her an injection. When Jinx became totally blind and incapacitated and I was in the hospital with suspected small strokes, Nat took her to the vet and held her while she got her last injection. We missed her a lot but she had had a good life and we did not want to see her suffer.

Already during high school Ronnie managed to obtain an after-school job in a hospital kitchen, preparing and shipping food which was trucked to various hospitals and nursing homes. He learned every facet of the business and even obtained a trucker's driver's license enabling him to drive the large truck to different destinations. In college he continued along the same line. He believed in paying for his own education and worked as a cook in a restaurant in Binghamton while keeping up his grades. In due time he became employed on the campus and managed one of the large dining halls.

Sharon nor Ronnie ever gave me a moment's aggravation. At those times that I would feel depressed I would bring that thought to mind and be thankful and try to raise my spirits by realizing that I had to have done something right.

My brother and his wife had moved to San Antonio after he closed his business in New York. They seemed to like Texas but I missed him and moreover, his move put a much larger part of the responsibility for my mother on my shoulders. She lived about 30 miles away in a small cooperative apartment. The only other relative was her sister who had suffered a stroke and lingered for about 5 years in various nursing homes before she died. Almost weekly I would pick my mother up and we would visit my aunt in the nursing home, bringing along some home-made soup, fruit, or a special delicacy we knew she was fond of. The last year or two she did not recognize us anymore and was asleep most of the time. Going on the parkway was still hard for me to do but I managed to keep it up. Instead of Valium I, by then, would have a faithful Xanax pill next to me on the seat.





Panic would still strike me at the most inopportune moments; walking in a department store; touring a flea market with a friend; at dinner in a restaurant - it could hit any time. Only later, when more medical literature was published on the subject and people began to discuss the symptoms did I find out that the problems I experienced were almost commonplace. It did not improve my situation but it made me feel less isolated.

From 1988 to 1990 I worked part-time for an insurance adjustment firm and I have to admit that it was by far the most boring job I had ever held. From tapes I would type up report after report which were then sent to the insurance companies with recommendations for settlement. The only report ever holding my attention was one covering an extensive fire in the home of Orthodox Jews and caused by lighted Sabbath candles igniting the drapes. This job was the last, part-time employment in my varied career.

For many years did periods of insomnia invade my nights. It got so bothersome that I hated to go to sleep as it would mean another night of tossing and turning. I was not the type to take it in stride, get up in the middle of the night and read a book or turn on the television. The expectation of another sleepless night would increase my nervousness which, in turn, resulted in the next night without sleep. When I did manage to doze off, nightmares would play out grotesque fantasies. Many of my dead relatives entered my dreams; also I found myself on a moving train time and again and the nightmare most often occurring was the one where I would see myself mired knee-deep in excrement, surrounded by unbelievably filthy bathrooms. Of course, I did not need Sigmund Freud to interpret these images. My poetry flourished. I noticed that my memory would fail me now and then which was put down in fitting verse. Loneliness and despair made for great themes while at other times, in a more lighthearted mood I was able to write about more mundane happenings, such as the change of seasons or an everyday occurrence.



\*

Overnight I lost my zest; my hair turned shades of grey;  
A memory put in reverse; what happened yesterday?

I keep on humming melodies from days I went to school;  
The words come back so easily; my mind is now a pool.

My dinner menu of last night remains a secret feature;  
But in my thoughts I clearly see my kindergarten teacher.

I've lost the middle of my life, kept only the beginnings;  
That's how it is supposed to be when starting final innings.

So when I do forget your name and look at you with wonder,  
Remember, it won't take too long before I'm six foot under.

\*

In 1979 Sharon graduated medical school and elected to continue with an internship and residency in surgery which would take the next 6 years. She remained in the Bronx and worked mainly at Montefiore Hospital. Always having taken the road of the most resistance she decided to continue after those six years and opted for specialization in cardio-thoracic surgery at Long Island Jewish Hospital. That took another two years but at least she remained close by.

In the meantime Ronnie had taken a job with Host Services, the company which supplies the airport restaurants with food. It was his first job after graduating college. After a few months he decided that if he had to work at such an exhausting pace for an employer, it might be more worthwhile to do so for himself. He found an empty wine and cheese place in Malverne, Long Island. The building had been vacant for some time and the only immediate advantages were a well-equipped kitchen and a good-sized parking lot. Various people had tried to make a go of this establishment but failed. Ronnie saw possibilities and at 22 he bought the business and opened a few months later. His "Cork 'n Board" started out as a wine and cheese place which he then changed into a comedy club, serving light fare. When he saw that there was a





definite need in the area for a family restaurant, he filled this need and Cork 'n Board became a full-fledged restaurant, serving excellent food and attracting a faithful following of neighborhood patrons. Word spread, and pretty soon people came from as far away as Brooklyn. The place flourished and on week-ends he would cater parties, either in the restaurant or on the outside. He would do everything those first few years, from cooking to ordering, from delivering for parties to meeting and greeting patrons. After a few years it became too much for one person and he took a partner. The schedule ran so smoothly that Ronnie decided to work part-time for an Italian fast-food concern. He soon became the trouble-shooter for that firm and built up and managed their various franchises in different parts of the city. He continued holding on to his two occupations for a few years. In the meantime he got married and presented me with a sweet daughter-in-law who is very dear to me. Both of them felt that they did not want to stay in New York permanently so Ronnie sold the business to his partner and he and his wife moved to Mesa, Arizona where they now have a lovely home. He is still working in the food industry and I do know that it will not take too long before he again will be in his own business. That's the type he is. Even though Arizona's temperature is often over the 100 mark, they seem to prefer the warmer climate.

\*

Away with winter's vengeful wrath  
Its chilly churlish freeze.  
Begone with sleet and snow which has  
Produced my constant sneeze.

The green of spring starts shining through  
All bare-armed trees in sight  
And what it further has to do  
Is blossoming their might.

The sun in weakest winter glow  
Is gathering in strength  
A tulip's trying hard to grow  
The days are gaining length.

Although each season has a call  
To dominate and shine,  
For me no winter, summer, fall,  
The time of spring is mine.





In the beginning of the eighties Nat started having problems with his hearing and complained of dizziness. Various trips to doctors' offices did not point to any conclusive ailment. The final consensus of the specialists was that he was probably suffering from Meniere's Syndrome, a disorder originating in the inner ear which could become incapacitating depending on the severity of the symptoms, especially the vertigo. He was then working in the printing business where a large transformation had taken place and many facets of the industry had been taken over by computer. Nat worked mainly with the computer, necessitating the use of many numbers and very small, exact measurements. He became less and less able to do his work adequately. Moreover, he was suffering from glaucoma. In 1986, after extensive hearings by government agencies he was put on disability and began to receive Social Security benefits. With the advance of medicine and the use of Magnetic Resonance Imaging it was subsequently discovered that his problem actually stemmed from a small, acoustic neuroma - in its early stages and too small to remove. From then on it would have to be checked every few years.

About this time Sharon had finished her studies and was working in California with a cardio-thoracic surgery team. Ronnie was ensconced in his restaurant and I had just stopped working for the direct mail order counselor and was between jobs. Nat was home every day now, busy with his hobby, painting, whenever he felt up to it. He created beautiful paintings which adorned our walls in every room of the house. At art shows he had won various ribbons. Actually he had never been schooled in the art and it had been I who used to do a lot of drawing in black charcoal. When the children were small, Nat bought me a large paint set but I never got to take up the brush because I was either too busy with the children or did not really feel up to starting. Eventually Nat gave it a try and ever since, he has not put down the brush, so to speak.

For a while, at the end of 1987, I went through a difficult time with myself. My panic attacks were in full swing and would now



last for a more extended period. My doctor suggested increasing the amount of tranquilizers but despite my misery I did not feel that to be the answer. Someone referred me to a different doctor, who specialized in pharmacology. When I visited him the first time I perceived that he considered me pretty much a mess. We talked and he suggested a certain combination of medication, explaining to me that the amount would have to be adjusted according to my reaction. I had nothing to lose and gave it a try. Within two months I felt better than I had in years. No more panic attacks, and periods of depression were under control. It was as if I got my life back; my energy returned. It was the period when I took the job with the insurance adjustors.

In April 1990 I read in "The Jewish Week" about a Rabbi in California who had bought an autograph book from Christie's auction house. The book had belonged to one of Anne Frank's and my classmates. The woman now lives in Spain and had charged Christie with the auctioning. The value of the book lay in a poem written by Anne on one of the pages with a picture pasted on the opposite page. As children we all used to have this type of album and our friends would write a verse in the book and decorate the opposite page with small, pretty decals.

The Rabbi in question was a dealer in Jewish art objects and manuscripts and lived near my daughter. I informed him by mail that I too had written a poem in the book. He was very happy with this information as it gave him the needed authentication he had been looking for. He checked the pages and found the one I had written. As a matter of fact, the original owner of the book had presented Christie with two pages of memories of her school days to be given to the buyer of the album. In those pages she mentions going with me to Anne's birthday parties.

When I visited Sharon in California the next time, I got in touch with the Rabbi and visited his home where he showed me the autograph book and Anne's and my pages. He then had copies made and gave them to me.





ver-

geet



4-3-40.

Beste Henny,

't Is weinig van waarde,

Hetgeen ik je bied.

Pluk rozen op aarde

En vergeet mij niet.

Door mij geschreeven  
Door mij gedaan  
Mijn dank  
Zo is mijn naam

Zij en zijn  
de datum  
31-9-40

mij





Lieve Henry



Wel soei! een vrouwtje op dit blad  
En bovendien nog vastgeplakt.  
En vraagt ze zeker en gewis,  
Wij dat de nieuwste mode is,  
Wel neem, mijn lieve meid  
Is enkel uit nieuwsgierigheid  
Op dat ze onder al uw vrienden,  
Hij. Bladrij het eens terug  
Zij vinden de vriendinnetje  
Bela salomons



My mother sold her apartment and moved near my brother in San Antonio to a beautiful senior citizens development which provided for all her needs. She took this step particularly because we had put our Long Island house on the market with the intention of leaving New York after selling it. Sharon kept pushing us to come out to California - she seemed to love the State. It was a very bad time to sell a house; it was a buyers' market and prices of housing continued to go down. We kept on trying and, in 1991, while we were visiting Sharon in California, our broker sold the house. We did not get the price we had hoped for but, under the circumstances it was a fair transaction. We had a few garage sales and gave a lot of our furniture away, not wanting to take any of it with us. Our heavy winter clothes were also disposed of. The only sale I regret is the one that parted me with my piano - a beautiful instrument which had given me many hours of pleasure. I do not know if that was the case for those listening to my playing. We did not have any idea where we would settle in California. Sharon indicated that she was planning to purchase a house in the Carmel vicinity and she wanted us to live there. Since the hospital where she operates is in the San Francisco area, she maintains an apartment nearby.

We sent our clothes by UPS to Sharon's apartment. The remainder of our personal possessions was put in cartons and kept in storage with a New York moving company until such time as we knew where we would settle.

We left New York for good by the end of August, 1991 and landed in San Francisco. Sharon had not as yet found her dream house so, after staying a while in her apartment we rented a condominium in Palm Springs for a few months in the hope that a desirable house would present itself during that time. It all fell into place. Sharon closed on a house in Carmel in the beginning of January, 1992 and we have lived there since.

Again I had made a big change. I left my friends behind - as well as my son and his wife - and we moved to a totally different State at the opposite end of the country. Once more I had to





get used to a different way of life and surroundings. After a while I managed very well although now and then I felt closed in by the large mountain ranges abounding in this part of California. I had always loved the Dutch, wide-open, flat countryside and Carmel Valley was just the opposite.

\*

My sight must the horizon see;  
My mind unhampered, feeling free  
To roam the unencumbered space  
Reaching where sky and earth embrace.

There should not be a hill so tall,  
Limitless barriers, a wall  
Keeping my senses bordered tight  
Surrounded by high mountains' might.

My world is suddenly enclosed;  
Away from what I love the most.  
I am now forced to question why  
There's really less that meets the eye.

Room I must have and wide my view;  
My wants are small, my wishes few;  
But my conclusion is that we're  
Just living in a fishbowl here.

\*

Slowly but surely I am beginning to settle in as a "Carmelian." There is a tremendous difference between the people out here and those I associated with on the East Coast and I just have to learn to be more relaxed and laid back. Compared to the New York scene, life in these surroundings is as if it is played in slow motion, and no one hurries or even honks a car horn.

My mother stayed with us in Palm Springs. She visited for a month and it was the first time in her 88 years that she got to see California. She enjoyed the beautiful landscape. A few times a week I would drop her off at the senior center in



Palm Springs and she would play duplicate bridge, her favorite pastime. She was a little anxious in the beginning as she was unfamiliar with the people in the center and especially the first few days it felt to me as if I was taking her to school for the first time.

\*

The people there you did not know  
Inside the senior center;  
You had seemed anxious to go,  
Not hesitant to enter.

"Don't worry, Mom, you're not alone"  
While writing down with care  
The number of my telephone  
And then I fixed your hair.

I said "If anything goes wrong,  
Or if the place 's a bore,  
In just a wink I'll be along"  
While I inched to the door.

You looked at me, then turned away,  
And fiddled with your comb,  
Then suddenly I heard you say,  
"But what if you're not home?"

I reassured you then and smiled,  
Thinking of time long past  
When a very small and timid child  
This same question had asked.

I waved goodbye, gave you a smile,  
And then exited fast,  
Watching you through the glass a while,  
You'd settled down at last.

How did you suddenly get old,  
Your sight and hearing slim;  
Always complaining that you're cold  
With memory so dim.





I liked it better at your knee  
When it was my Mom you were;  
This role reversal is not for me  
In fact, it is not fair.

My mind confused, my feelings numb,  
I think it's kind of wild,  
At my age I've become a Mom  
Of yet another child.

\*

Shortly, my Mom will again travel to California, this time to stay  
in Carmel with us. When she is here I intend to show her all the  
beautiful sights I have come to appreciate, especially the old  
cypress tree, a survivor against great odds.

\*

He's standing there so patiently;  
The knotty, gnarled old cypress tree;  
Arthritic, bald, in sun and cloud  
He carries on, his bearing proud.

So many years have passed him by,  
That now and then he wonders why  
With limbs torn from his brittle frame  
He keeps upright, strong just the same.

Through all the storms, the wind and rain;  
Through violent gales, through quakes and pain  
He weathered all, though tired and old  
Stayed brave in heat, fought against cold.

So, do admire this lonely tree  
Which takes his knocks and just like we  
Fights for survival, holding on  
Until at last his strength is gone.

\*



A famous Dutch writer, with the pen name of "Multatuli" starts one of his works with the statement, "I do not know where I shall die." If he were still around I might answer him that fate in my life took me to many places on this earth and that I cheated death a few times. So, I share his sentiments as I ponder:

I don't know where eventually  
My head is put to rest.  
Where will I die, where shall it be,  
The north, east, south or west.



## THAT'S THAT

When I am laid to final rest,  
What I ask you to do  
Is sprinkle me with cool black earth  
And blanket me with dew;  
As curtains pull the clouds around,  
Spread colored flowers on the ground,  
Make sure the sky is blue.

A fan of cool winds would be nice,  
But please no hail or snow,  
Lest all those forces served to hide  
I finally did go.

And yes, by all means, don't forget  
A stone to make it clear  
Where I am resting, lie asleep,  
To show that I was here.  
Cause even though it may be said  
I did not leave my mark,  
Now that I'm buried, cold and dead,  
Alone and in the dark,  
You must admit and graciously,  
I made a valiant try  
To fight and win, or just to fight,  
But never gathered why;  
Was it all worth my being here;  
Did someone care or what;  
I'm dead, gone struggles, pain and fear,  
I'm dead, and that is that;





For many years after the war, scant research was done and limited attention given to physical and psychological damage lingering in survivors of concentration camps or hidden persons, for that matter. In the seventies, a concerned effort was made to retain - for future historical significance - the individual experiences of victims, many of whom had died already. For this purpose, survivors were interviewed and taped recordings made.

The conclusion arrived at was that there was a marked difference in the type and amount of damage perceived in those who were adults during the war and people who had been persecuted as children. One of the more prestigious organizations to solely occupy itself with child survivors is the Jerome Riker International Study of Organized Persecution of Children, sponsored by Child Development Research at Sands Point, Long Island. One of the project directors is Dr. Judith Kestenberg, a psychiatrist who, together with her husband, Milton, a lawyer, became very involved in this study.

Dr. Kestenberg was the person who interviewed me and led me, on tape, from my childhood right to the point and time of the interview. The Institute also collected paintings, poetry and writings done by this particular group. It seemed that the child survivors - now adults - were suffering more after-effects than the other group. Also, an unusually large percentage of these child-survivors had been trying all along to express their feelings through art forms. By so doing they were trying to vent suppressed emotions of horror, abuse and grief which, as children, they had gone through, without being able to deal with the suffering.

A very interesting exhibit took place in May, 1989 in New York City where, under the title "Shadows of a Lost Childhood" an impressive quantity and quality of paintings, drawings, poetry and prose was displayed, all having the theme of the Holocaust in clear view. Some of my poetry was also included in this particular showing.



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and  
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OF ORGANIZED PERSECUTION OF CHILDREN  
invite you to view an exhibition of remembrance

SHADOWS OF A LOST CHILDHOOD

Works by survivor artists and poets who were children in the Holocaust

Jerzy Bitter	Helen Singer Kaplan	Irena Rutenberg
Pierre Boernig	Dori Katz	Ruth Minsky Sender
Nat Borsky	Cecilie Klein	Ann Shore
Paula Cytryn	Akiba Kohane	Rebecca Siegel
Zahava Eckstein	Ephraim Peleg	Gabriele Silten
Toby Fluek	Liane Reif-Lehrer	Suzanne Szekely
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There exists a compulsion in survivors - whether they were hidden or liberated from camps - to search each other out and to, in a manner of speaking, huddle together and share experiences over and over. Groups were formed all over the world, linking these people in an unbreakable common bond. I, myself also felt this need to be part of such gatherings and found that our get-togethers did more to ease present suffering which dated from that period than any medication or psychiatrist was able to accomplish. There seemed to be a closeness, an intensity of feeling, shared by persons who clung together like long-lost siblings. One single word could conjure up memories similar to all of us. Emotions, unknown to the outsider, were shared and understood, because they were feelings each and every one of us harbored. Wherever one went there was to be found a group of survivors, organized and in the process of creating their own, so to speak, psychotherapy in their relationships.

In Palm Springs I joined such a group and I am also part of a larger organization in the Los Angeles area which is very active and often meet and celebrate holidays and special occasions. The members' poetry or prose is published and they operate as a close-knit family. In their newsletter, as part of the masthead, the phrase "Children of the Holocaust Finding Each Other" is prominently placed which is further explained as "We are all Child Survivors of the war, estranged from our own childhood and the world we were born into. This Newsletter helps us connect to each other and the past."

Instead of dwindling as is necessarily the case with the number of survivors, there is an urgency to get even closer to one another, to procure strength from our sameness in a world unable - and often unwilling at this time - to make an effort and comprehend what draws us together with such magnetic force. There seems to be an intrinsic support emanating from the groups which benefits each member and serves, one time or another, to keep that member from despair, depression and feelings of estrangement.



The amazing thing is that this grouping does not stop here. New gatherings are now in existence consisting of children, and even grandchildren of Holocaust survivors.

Children of victims seem to be saddled - in a peculiarly similar way - with certain problems unique to only them. They, too share a common bond because they had to grow up with a parent or parents who had spent part of their lives in hell. The similarities of the parents' problems affected the likeness of difficulties experienced by their sons and daughters. There exists, first of all, the lack of extended family, as well as a host of additional problematic "points in common" - a subject on which a variety of books and papers have been written in great detail.

It is anyone's guess how many generations it will take to ease, or possibly erase the detrimental domino effect which did not suddenly start with the ravings of a madman in Germany, but the roots of which had been planted from the beginning of time. The Holocaust constituted the climax of unbridled, unjustified hate to be found in literature, religious oratory, art, doctrine and any other medium of expression through the centuries. Hate without cause is dangerous, primitive and uncivilized - often directed at minorities and it calls into play the worst base instincts of man.



## SOUNDLESS SILENCE

I'm searching for the sweetful sound of silence;  
The quiet melody so soft it almost seems  
As if it gently is created  
From peaceful slumber undisturbed by dreams.

I'm longing for the stillness of the waters  
Unrippled by a wave crest, reaching deep;  
Its watchful banks in quietude embracing,  
No sudden motion trespassing its sleep.

I also hear a threatening sound of silence,  
Drawn forth from grief, the harbinger of pain,  
A muteness born of fear, of apprehension  
Increasing in its strength rather than wane.

But I am searching for the perfect silence,  
To hold me tight in its tranquility  
And anchor me forever more protected  
Deserving of restful eternity.





Since moving to the Carmel area, I have become more than ever involved in speaking engagements, Holocaust Remembrance Days, radio programs and recently in speaking at the opening of the Anne Frank Exhibit in the towns of Watsonville and Santa Cruz. In contrast to the East Coast, there are few survivors here and even though it is not something I ask for, I feel it my obligation to accept participating in this kind of ceremonies.

The most difficult question asked, or rather the hardest question to answer was during a live radio show when the host inquired whether, after all I went through, I still believed in God. My answer at that time may not have been too clear or eloquent on the spur of the moment but what I tried to convey was that so very many of those killed went to their death never wavering in their beliefs. They were religious people and this trust in God made it almost easy for them to face the end. They were serene to their last breath. For me to now say that God was not in the death camps would feel like a desecration of their faith. It would, through its meaning, indicate that all those who died did so without purpose and if their death had no significance, then their lives also were wasted.

At no time in my life did I deny or doubt the existence of a Supreme Power with the ability of creation as well as extinction. Where was God in the death camps? Maybe I'll just stick to a thought I had as a child at that time - an idea as good as any other - God was crying and did not see us through His tears.



BETWEEN YOU AND ME, LORD

You must have been there, Lord, when the earth was created,  
When you gracefully formed the moon and the stars;  
It must have been you who fashioned all humans,  
But how about plagues and abominable wars?

You did hold my hand, Lord, when I bore my children,  
So very much wanted, so lovely and fair;  
And as they grew older you did protect them,  
I watched them down here, and you did from up there.

My question is this, though, Lord, were you around  
When so many of your creations were slain;  
Was genocide part of your plan for us mortals,  
I'm trying to decide what you had to gain.

I do hope and trust, Lord, that somewhere around you  
You gathered their souls, and hold them with care;  
That you plan to give special love to these beings,  
Reserve them the best place, right near your chair.

If that was your motive, Lord, I can still love you,  
And restore my trust in you, feel again free;  
Please watch over the souls of all who are with you  
So I can believe in you, Lord, do you see?





Why am I writing all of this down now, at my stage in life. It is certainly not a quest for immortality. Delving into my past and trodding through the years is a difficult, at times painful exercise. Possibly I am in pursuit of an explanation for the origin of the stressful periods behind me in an effort to better cope with what may lie ahead. Then, also, I may be trying to express that I was, went through and lived on in the name of so many whose rights to a normal existence were thwarted. It could be an attempt to explain to my children, and those after, as well as to all survivors' children, that certain problems and undulations they are experiencing in their lives are undoubtedly the direct result of being the progeny of a survivor. Finally, and most probably, my words constitute regret for their becoming second-hand victims of a period in time when they had not, as yet, been born.

I shall attempt to clarify the above. Those survivors who experienced the war years between the ages of, say, 6 and 16 would, later in their lives, have the most difficulty in recovering - if at all. These persons were made to feel inferior at a time of maturing when self-respect, individuality and identity were not, as yet, firmly established. They did not go through the rebellion, sexual awakening and discovery of the emotion of love connected with the years of puberty. They exited from hell older in years, but completely immature in the art of demonstratively giving, as well as accepting love. This does not imply that they were incapable of feeling love; the contrary is the case. Their feelings went deep, but reaching out and expressing emotions remained a stumbling block. In a broad way it can be compared with a person who stutters; knows exactly what to say but is unable to bring out the words in smoothly-running sentences.

A phenomenon known in the camps was that of the so-called *müselmen*. They were those people whose spirit was broken to the extent that they looked and behaved similar to walking dead. All feeling had ceased to live and a mere human outer



shell remained. After only a short time they would die, devoid of will, direction and, especially, purpose. To a similar extent this syndrome attacked young people.

I recognize that there were various times in that hellish existence when I surpassed my pain threshold; when I went beyond the boundaries of endurance - when, in order to survive I had to totally numb my physical and mental responses and suppress all feeling. Standing at appel in the freezing cold, hands and feet frostbitten, I could have stood there twice the hours because I had successfully closed off all senses. This same recourse must have been at my disposal at my father's death; the night that we waited to be blown up; when seeing my friends' bodies piled on top of each other and it has become a subterfuge many times after in my life. Under certain circumstances it has been the only defense mechanism aimed at survival available to me. This syndrome, more than any other experience during those years, injured me and came to haunt me later.

In the war years my emotions stayed suppressed and created a space for themselves deep inside my being. Pity for so many must have lived next to grief, giving the greater space to rage - dangerous and destructive. These emotions never had a chance to actualize at the opportune moments and they are still in existence. By now they are all mixed up and sometimes a little comes to the surface, often at the most inappropriate and unbefitting instances. Hopefully there will come a time that I can either let them out or lay them to rest.

I am now close to the age of a "senior citizen" and feel that I should, in my own way, put down on paper that episode of my life that has overshadowed all my days. Some days have been good, some bad. It has been a life that was unalterably changed during 5 years of terror; 5 years that I will not be able to erase from my memory for the time that I am destined to live in the future.

So, here it is. One story among many. An introspective attempt at connecting cause and effect. Glimpses of a life's memories sprinkled on paper.

Rebecca Siegel



Please God, I want another chance;  
I want to try once more ;  
There are so very many things  
I never did before.

I really never loved, you know  
While tasting joy of living;  
I'd like to take once in a while  
Because I'm tired of giving.

Please, God, there were so many years  
So lonely and so sad;  
When wakening a nightmare seemed;  
Those years I never had.

My days of youth I want once more  
With chance to pick and choose;  
The time I really want to spend  
Are years that I did lose.

Please God, I think you owe me time  
Of careless joy, in laughter;  
Young once again, heart full of hope  
To strengthen me for after.

So many places I should see  
And feel emotions strong,  
My heart relieved, my mind at ease;  
I don't ask for too long.

I feel I more than got my share  
Of sadness and of pain;  
Those hours forever lost to me  
I can't get back again.

So, strictly speaking, just once chance,  
To you it cannot matter;  
That I may live and freely move;  
This time I'll do it better.





WHY, HOW, WHEN AND WHERE

How can I leave when I just cannot part  
Why should I end when I never did start  
And why is it day when the sun doesn't shine  
For whom should I sacrifice all that is mine.

Where can I begin when I am at the end  
Try to be soft when I just cannot bend  
How can I lose and not feel any grief  
When I want to stay, tell me, how do I leave.

Why do I fight an invisible force  
How can I hurt and then not feel remorse  
When may I leave and feel good as I go  
And why are my spirits then high and then low.

Why do I hurt every day of my life  
And how can I leave here in joy, not in strife  
Where do I go when no road I can see  
And what do I have to do now to be free.

Is not the sky sometimes blue and then grey  
Are there not so many hours in a day  
First comes the horse and then follows the cart  
So tell me why is it that I cannot part.



## CHOICE

This day will never come again;  
Fading away as so many before  
All that is left will be the core  
Of happenings ahead.

This hour will never come again;  
Unique its moments, fraught with pain;  
This hour I'll never live again.

This day nor hour I want to hold  
There is a choice to make;  
Be it not better to forsake  
What lies ahead and fold.

The days and hours are giving me  
A legacy of destiny,  
A present that may disappear  
If I don't choose to hold it dear.

Balancing misery with rapture  
Is hard to do with even hand  
Considering all that is in store  
It seems that one's unhappiness  
Is always felt much more.

So why stick around another day  
And hope, and long in vain;  
The only good being this life  
Will not be lived again.





OH, TO BE A GRAIN OF SAND

I do not want the night to fall,  
To cloud and hide from sight  
The all-pervasive sunlight of the  
Summer days, casting shadows, spreading rays  
Of clarity - so I can see you close.

I like to watch the waterfall,  
Rushing and gushing foaming streams  
Over the pebbly road of rocks which gleam  
Teeming with a color bright,  
Lighting its wall of wetness wide.

If only nature would allow and take me,  
How, I do not know but in the sand, the rocks, the sea  
There has to be a place for me,  
A spot that's mine, where I can sit  
Or stand or lie, but always fit.



## HOMESICK

I'm homesick but no place to go  
I search for something but don't know  
Exactly where to make appear  
The reason why to keep me here.

Elusive as my aim may be,  
Only one way there's left for me.  
To make it right and then pull through  
Requires excessive strength to do.

It takes more courage to hold on,  
To not let go and stumble  
Than letting all cares soar away  
And mercifully crumble.



## I PASS

I passed this way but once  
And never will again;  
I want no other chance  
To live this world of man.

No more bright flowers, bird song sweet  
To guide me in my track,  
It's inhumanity I meet,  
Keeps me from wanting back.

One has to be an imbecile  
To trudge and hurt while going  
Why spend my last remaining will  
To hold on and keep rowing.

But no more, I have had my fill  
I don't have land in sight;  
My ship is sinking, standing still  
And I have lost the fight.

For those who care to read these words,  
Give them a second glance,  
Please do believe that I am glad  
I passed this way but once.





## WHY WAS I HERE

When I am gone will there still be  
Fish silvering quickly in the sea;  
Tall mountains standing proud and high;  
Small children asking "How" and "Why."

When comes one day I am no more  
Will still be waves crashing the shore;  
Would life continue as before  
Even though I am no more.

Will there still a sun be shining  
When I cannot see;  
And will clouds have a silver lining  
Even without me.

When I am gone and dust  
And all my senses stilled for good  
Stilted in my house of wood  
As we all one day must.

If all continues as before  
When I'm no more around;  
If heavens are still spreading stars  
While I am in the ground.

Then may I ask why was I here  
While I am still alive;  
Is what I do now rated dear,  
The purpose of my strife.

And will it count when at the end  
Leaving all those I treasured  
Before a higher might I stand  
My deeds with care are measured.

So give the time still left to me  
To do my tasks with care;  
May I do good so destiny  
Will know that I was there.



## THAT'S THAT

When I am laid to final rest  
What I ask you to do  
Is sprinkle me with cool black earth  
And blanket me with dew.  
As curtains pull the clouds around,  
Spread colored flowers on the ground  
Make sure the sky is blue.

A fan of cool winds would be nice  
But please, no hail or snow,  
Lest all those forces served to hide  
I finally did go.

And yes, by all means, don't forget  
A stone to make it clear  
Where I am resting, lie asleep,  
To show that I was here.

Cause even though it may be said  
I did not leave my mark,  
Now that I'm buried, cold and dead,  
Alone and in the dark,  
You must admit and graciously,  
I made a valiant try  
To fight and win, or just to fight,  
But never gathered why.

Was it all worth my being here;  
Did someone care or what;  
I'm dead, gone struggles, pain and fear,  
I'm dead and that is that!





## ON THE BIRTH OF JOSHUA

You are the child who was born of my child  
The miracle I never thought would be,  
But now you're here and truly I can see  
My future brightening in your peaceful smile.

When I look down upon your face so dear,  
Your fingers clenching mine in given trust  
I think of those forgotten in the dust,  
Their lives cut off, ended in nameless fear.

My thoughts go back in time when all I knew  
Was that the end would come and soon it would,  
My sight reduced to just a bowl of food  
To make it through another day or two.

You Josh you are the child they never wanted born,  
But in your eyes I see a future bright,  
Created by your faith which holds the might  
Of heralding the clarity of dawn.

You Josh stand in for them and take the place  
Of the short lives of many little ones  
Who never had the opportunity or chance  
To play and live out their remaining days.

You are my shining candle, little guy;  
The brilliant light warming my anxious heart  
That now hurts so much less, gone is the smart  
Of the haunting constant question asking "why".

And as along the path of life you go,  
You'll be a man with pride and dignity  
Who won't retreat, who never has to flee  
And not stand still, but search and always grow.

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